



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

Living Faith in Suffolk



Living in Later Years: Nourishing and Supporting Spirituality in Older People

Images

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Living in Later Years is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on www.cofesuffolk.org

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Introduction

Living in Later Years is a Living Faith in Suffolk course for people who want to explore, for themselves or for others, how to live a full life in older years, focussing particularly on spiritual aspects. The course has been developed using the lived experiences of a range of older people and biblical material to help the reflection and discussions.

This is a five week course for groups. The first session focuses on the changes that have (or may) come with growing older and the second explores ways of balancing the 'ordinary' with spiritual aspects of older life. The third session examines how older people can continue to give and receive as part of our communities and the fourth how to go on receiving from God and being part of the church's service in the world. The final session looks at the practical aspects of dying and gives attention to the spiritual aspects that are also part of the process.

- Session 1: Growing Older (page 4)
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The material has a rhythm that encourages the basic habits of living faith, through attending to God, to each other and to the world beyond the group.

For facilitators

- Each session should last around 90 minutes overall including the settling down and welcome. The Receiving, Reflecting and Responding sections are the core of each session.
- The room used for the sessions needs to be comfortable enough for people to be able to give attention to what they are doing together. It is also important that people can hear one another.
- To help people listen to one another and to make the timings work, a recommended group size is 8 – 10 people.
- In each session there are things to see, hear and do, and it is important to ensure that enough time is allowed to give space for each part. A list of resources to prepare is given in the left-hand column for each session. Think about how to display the icon (session 5) so that it can be seen.
- It is helpful to both see (read) the Bible story and to hear it. It is possible to find the words and hear it read on Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com) where NIVUK gives an audio version in UK English.

Session 1: Growing Older

Each session is shaped around an opening **Ritual**, **Relating** to each other, **Receiving** from God, **Reflecting** on what has been received, **Responding** to God in the light of this as we look at the content of the session, and **Returning** as we close in prayer.

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Large paper for writing/ drawing changes and blessings (Introduction), and for writing/ drawing what to weep, laugh, mourn, dance (Reflecting).
- Text of Psalm 71 for reading aloud

Silent reflection can be very difficult for some people; depending on the make-up of the group it may be that the suggested 5-10 minutes needs to be reduced.

This session aims to recognise some of the changes of growing older and explore how to respond to those changes.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: An opportunity to introduce ourselves to each other, the building and the whole course. Where are we in ourselves? In the whole group share one thing you enjoy about the age you are now and one thing that is a challenge.

Introduction to today's session: Read these two experiences:

“ [I found I was] taking part in organised sessions for the elderly and learning about memory loss, Alzheimer's and strokes through having my mother living with us. I was using local day centres and researching into the facilities provided by nursing/ residential homes. I became a user of varied agencies for advice and help and became more in tune with the needs of, and provisions for, the not so young. ”

“ Old people have to down-size. To fit into a small flat or one room from living in a house is a painful experience, which I have not yet had to face. There are many treasured things which we have to get rid of. Our horizons become limited as time goes on: we may not be able to drive or go out, ours becomes a small world, forcing us in on ourselves. In our faith we have an escape, we still have the richness of a relationship outside ourselves. ”

Even without the other changes that accompany increasing age, retirement can have a significant impact on a person's feelings of identity, value and purpose.

- Brainstorm the changes of retirement, of poorer physical health, of poorer mental capacity, of loss of family/ friends, of moving to a smaller home, and of moving to a retirement/ nursing home.
- Which of these changes are perceived to be negative? What are the blessings of this time?

Receiving: The Psalms reflect many life experiences. This one asks for God's protection and help even when we have grey hair! Someone read aloud Psalm 71.

“ **A Scripture that has been a challenge** and encouragement: John 10:10 – ‘I came that you might have life and you might have it to the full.’ ”

People in the Bible who might also give us inspiration when growing older include Abraham (Genesis 15-23), Naomi (Ruth), and Eli (1 Samuel 1-4).

Reflecting: In silence, spend about 5-10 minutes with this passage. Read it through again. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you as an older person, and/or caring for older people. At the end of the time, the leader reads aloud the passage once more.

Share and discuss:

- What did you notice during this?

We read in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4) that ‘For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.’

You might like to try noting, as a group, what you noticed as something about which to weep or laugh or mourn or dance (on a flipchart if one is available).

Responding: In the light of what we have shared so far, in growing older, and/or caring for people growing older:

- what do we find that we need to accept?
- what new gifts might we have?
- what could we take on/discover?
- how might we ‘hold’ our sadnesses?
- how can we give thanks?

Here are four experiences:

“ I felt it was the right time to put my energies, my learning ... and life’s experiences together with my spiritual calling to provide an opportunity for the elderly to meet together for fellowship, food and worship regularly. I talked it through with my priest and this is how the Soup Lunch and Service began. ... I targeted three very pastorally committed people to begin with and talked it through... All were good cooks and happy making soup! ”

“ Thanksgiving is at the heart of Christian Spirituality. The Eucharist, Greek word for Thanksgiving, is increasingly important, because of its central thanksgiving prayer and the bread and wine as the reminder that Christ’s presence and forgiveness are received. Thanksgiving can permeate the whole of life as we give thanks for the new day and being alive to enjoy it. We are always free to make decisions to choose to respond to any situation we find ourselves in, by giving thanks for what we have been given, rather than bemoaning what we have not got. ”

“ Once relating an epic emergency-run to Papworth hospital to our dear Bishop Clive – I told him that I later felt very guilty that for the first time I found that I did not - could not - pray. Bishop Clive's reply was that because I was being so well cared for spiritually [by the love of our Lord] and physically by two wonderful para-medics – I was not required to add anything.”

“ [Staying in a residential home] I have met a beautiful Christian lady of 94, [I will call] Grace Mary. She shines and is humorous with it, a bit deaf, a bit lame, accepts life as it comes, realises that she has shortly to move into a room rather than her flat now. She tells amusingly of her past as a Land Girl but also is totally au fait with current affairs. I watch as she gently coaxes the elderly men into conversation, is infinitely appreciative of the carers and shines with a radiance which influences others. She has taught me not to avoid the garrulous and complaining few, but rather to listen with gentler understanding and not to let their unhappiness affect my own equilibrium or we might all risk going down that slippery slope of depression.”

For more conversations and exploration on growing older see **Seasons of my Soul: Conversations in the second half of life** (The Methodist Church/ Church of England, 2014) has eight themes for conversations and exploration: identity, memories; transition times; wisdom; roles and relationships; forgiveness and reconciliation; death and dying, and the celebration of life.

Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to today's session?

Returning: Offer yourselves /your efforts to God in your own words or use the words below:

Lord Jesus, thank you that you know first-hand what it is to be human. So we place into your hands

- the things that make us weep, including *[name some things shared]*;
- the things that make us laugh, including *[name some things shared]*;
- the things that make us mourn, including *[name some things shared]*;
- the things that make us dance, including *[name some things shared]*.

Lord, help our efforts to accept, discover, take on, 'hold' and give thanks... that we may find and share the life you offer, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Session 2: Whole life

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of Genesis 18:1-15 and Genesis 21:1-7 for reading aloud

The story of Sarah and her husband

Abraham (initially called Sarai and Abram) can be found in Genesis 12-23.

Abraham is held up as an example of a person of faith, willing to leave everything and go wherever God sends him. As his wife Sarah stays with him, following his instruction about how to behave in the places they visit, giving him her slave-girl to bear him a child when she herself is unable to and then having to deal with feelings of jealousy as a result, providing hospitality and receiving God's promise of a child in her old age.

This session aims to develop a sense of the importance of both the spiritual and the 'ordinary' in living well as older people.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we in ourselves? In the whole group share one thing about today and one thing that you remember from the last session – if you decided there was something for you to do from last time, how did you get on? This is a time to welcome what each person says rather than discuss it, unless the speaker requests a response.

Introduction to today's session:

“ A popular view of spirituality may be that it is some sort of personal meditation which we do on our own, or a matter of someone to come and give us communion. I feel that it is much more than that.

To me I value adopting a balanced life style for the whole day. St. Benedict taught the world's need of this in the 6th century. The Benedictine order is based on a life of prayer, work, leisure, hospitality.

Older people find that they cannot do things for too long. I can only garden for half an hour before I feel like a rest or my back aches. ... I am glad I inherited a pattern of daily worship, bible reading and prayer, which I have continued and look forward to each day in retirement. It enriches my day. I still help out when asked, taking services and visiting because I feel it gives me purpose in life. I could not sit all day reading or watching television.”

In your days/ the days of an older person you care for, what might be

- prayer?
- work?
- leisure?
- being open to others (hospitality)?

Receiving: In the culture of the time, Abraham's wife, Sarah, was in the background, seeing to practical things, and enabling hospitality. But she also recognised God's grace, particularly in the gift of her son Isaac (meaning laughter).

Someone read aloud Genesis 18:1-15 and Genesis 21:1-7.

Reflecting: In silence, spend about 5-10 minutes with these passages. Read them through again. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you as an older person, and/or caring for older people. At the end of the time, the leader reads aloud the passages once more.

Share and discuss:

- What did you notice during this?
- What might Sarah's prayer, work, leisure and hospitality have been?

Responding: In the light of what we have shared so far, in growing older, and/or caring for people growing older:

- How do we make the balance for ourselves? How do we help create this balance for those individuals for whom we care?

Here are two experiences:

“ What have I missed here [in a residential home]? Praise and worship. I have found it hard to sing as I do all day at home. The Psalms have fitted my different moods, but it has been an effort to settle to them: perhaps because of my great tiredness after my operation and maybe it will be the same on returning home. Friends visiting have been a wonderful support, but it has been like living in two worlds. Possibly in a decade or so I shall welcome this more limited way of life and embrace it thankfully like lovely Grace Mary. As I prepare to leave I tell her what a shining example she has been to me: her response is that the Lord has been so good to her that she has to do likewise. A gentle reminder of how we should all be in whatever situation we find ourselves. ”

“ Using our 'Memories room' [in another residential home] with its objects from wartime life – pictures – even hats worn at their weddings and old photographs identity cards etc., from the past helped in 'memory stimulation' and encouraged conversation. Equally useful and inspiring, the 'Activities Room', once again helped residents to 'remember' and achieve quite an artistic talent in painting and drawing, flower arranging and even cooking (small scale). Thus they gained their sometimes lost confidence in their abilities and it also enabled them to know that I was always there for them. ”

“ A Scripture that has been an inspiration:

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 –
'I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.' ”

- What can we do together that helps the balance of spiritual and 'ordinary'? Here is one experience:

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“ [A one-off event showed us that] the combination of worship and eating a meal together delivered a welcome which reached beyond the regular church congregation. The worship was informal, the singing uninhibited and there were requests for more. [For the regular Service and Soup Lunch] the three helpers and my priest all contributed to the decision that the format would take. I had the offer of music on the electric piano/ organ by a wonderful spontaneous gentleman who also played the accordion. He could cope with requests.

1. Round tables, café style with embroidered tablecloths...
2. A hymn sandwich: hymn, reading and a short talk (to begin with by our priest), 2nd hymn, prayers, 3rd hymn ending with sharing the Grace.... (We still use Mission Praise with sheets for special requests.)
3. The soup lunch consisting of a choice of soup, bread, coffee or tea and biscuits.

The Service and Soup Lunch is now 12 years old and has provided:

- Opportunities for fellowship with God and each other in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Support and pastoral care when unwell, distressed, or when friends and family are called home.
- Growth in spirituality, and in the confidence in using the gifts of those who come.
- Listening and telling their stories.
- Peace and contentment in those who just like to be there...
- Participants lead prayers, sometimes their own words.
- Participants often contribute with comments, giving examples of their Christian experiences.
- We are willing to organise transport for our friends who have moved into residential homes and are still able to come.
- Of course we are aware of everyone’s favourite soups!! Home-grown veg. and homemade bread.
- We are blessed with soup makers and very willing helpers who cover and come when they can.
- We are also blessed with cake-makers and there is always a cake for the birthday girl or boy. We sing Happy Birthday and they always act surprised!!!
- The whole venture has created a balanced atmosphere of joy and at times sorrow, nurturing and enabling everyone to make it their own space in time with their Maker.”

- What might we take on? Here are two experiences:

“ Prayers were also important, highlighting that there were those who lived alone – those in need or no longer able to join us – thus reminding those living in very warm and comfortable conditions that there are many who are less fortunate and very frightened for their future. Also it serves as a reminder that it is still very important to think of others. ”

“ [Also, the Service and Soup Lunch has a] dish for contributions:

The voluntary contributions have provided for:-

1. A girl's education and treats in Rwanda. Some of the ladies write to her and we get frequent replies which show her development.
2. Contributed £1000 to the benefice quota.
3. Made a donation to the local church school.
4. Purchased cups and saucers for one of our churches.
5. Contributed to the money needed for gift boxes at Christmas
6. Purchased a stole for our SSM [Self-Supporting Minister].
7. Moneys are taken for some expenses. One of the helpers is treasurer and reports with figures and cash to the church treasurer. The system is accountable with all decisions on finance made by those who come. ”

Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to today's session?

Returning: Offer yourselves /your efforts to God in 2 minutes of silence followed by

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.

Session 3: Community

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of Psalm 139:13-16 and of Matthew 25:31-46 for reading aloud

“ Another example of God’s love – Isaiah

46:4: ‘Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.’ ”

The Debenham

Project is developing a caring community, caring for people with dementia and their carers: www.the-debenham-project.org.uk

This session aims to explore how, when life is more limited, we can still be part of community, giving and receiving.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we in ourselves? In the whole group share one thing about today and one thing that you remember from the last session – if you decided there was something for you to do from last time, how did you get on? This is a time to welcome what each person says rather than discuss it, unless the speaker requests a response.

Introduction to today’s session: Human beings can be wonderfully loving and supportive but in later years, as at other stages, this cannot be taken for granted. Here are two negative experiences:

“ Mother Teresa of Calcutta is rightly recognised for picking up the dying on the streets of Calcutta. Yet in our own country there are elderly people who are left alone ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ ”

“ Post-operatively I am here for convalescence so what I say may be coloured by my own present pain and fatigue for which I apologise in advance. This is a wonderful warm caring establishment with fantastic staff and food to die for (except we are all living well by it!) My present experience shows that folk are in survival mode, meals all-important, special places to sit jealously guarded and on occasion they are quite unkind to one another with their exclusion of others. (I jokingly said I’d better lunch at the pub the first day as I was turned away from two tables!) Perhaps they feel marginalised themselves and simply pass this on to others? ”

In contrast, the Debenham Project in Suffolk says, ‘If it’s not good enough for my mother, it is not good enough.’

- What is important in our feeling we are still part of a community?

Receiving: This psalm shows that we cannot prevent ourselves being known and loved by God. And Jesus told this story about

“ **Decisions are made** by younger people in the caring professions, the church and in society about the needs and ways to help older people without taking into account how old people themselves feel about these issues. In my experience older people feel very differently about their approach to life than younger people. ”

“ **During those 25 years** I felt that through my 'Ministry to the Elderly' I was journeying with so many different characters – from all walks of life. For those with whom I worked had so much to offer (often teaching us a great deal about ourselves) – always ready to contribute both to simple worship (often being adamant that they weren't really Christian) and yet eager to remain and enjoy the general conversation/discussion that followed. This also continued when we met on a one-to-one basis. ”

the importance of caring for others.
Someone read aloud Psalm 139:13-16.
Someone else read aloud Matthew 25:31-46.

Reflecting: In silence, spend about 5-10 minutes with these passages. Read them through again. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you as an older person, and/or caring for older people. At the end of the time, the leader reads aloud the passages once more.

Share and discuss:

- What did you notice during this?
- From these Bible passages, what do you notice about being part of a community?

Responding: In the light of what we have shared so far, in growing older, and/ or caring for people growing older:

- How is our giving and receiving two-way?
- How are we Christian community with people who are unable to give in active ways?
- How are people who are housebound part of our community?
- How are people in care homes part of our community?
- How are older people who still work part of our community?

Here are four experiences:

“ Christianity has always been seen as something we do with other people, never as a lone experience. I have Experienced the support of being part of a church group. It meant a lot to me when I was undergoing treatment for prostate cancer. It was a group who I felt supported me, who I could talk to and be supported in prayer. I feel the importance of regularly meeting with others for worship increases with age. In such a group it is possible to experience difference, love, and forgiveness. I welcome singing as part of worship; I feel that it is an essential part of worship frequently mentioned in the psalms, for example psalms 95 and 96. I find it can take me out of myself. Singing and music are very important to people with dementia. ”

“ We rang the bell; soon the key was put in the door and Jean opened it to us. The churchwarden, Jill, and I had decided to visit together. Jean smiled at us and invited us in. Jill explained that we had come from church since we knew from her daughter that Jean had not been well and we

“ WHAT MORE COULD WE

DO? Local Churches could organise ecumenically, visiting all residents in the home personally with the full agreement and cooperation of the home.

The visits would be offered to all residents not just the ones who are or were churchgoers.

The visitors would need training and to be accredited in some way.

The function of the visitor is to give time to each resident she/ he visits.

They should be for at least 15 minutes. They must be regular, ideally once a week.

Active older Church people could be used as long as they are not overwhelmed with people to visit each week.

Visitors should meet and support each other and be supported by the Church. ”

had missed Jean's contribution to worship. 'I know your faces', said Jean, 'but who are you?'

'Well, I'm Jill – do you remember I play the organ (at this Jill demonstrated as if playing a keyboard). 'Oh yes,' said Jean turning her head towards me. 'Yes,' I responded, 'I take the services, I'm the priest,' as I spoke I pulled aside my coat so that Jean could see my clerical collar.

Later in the conversation, we asked Jean if she would like communion brought to her home, 'O no' was the reply, 'this place is not holy enough.' ”

“ So far in a week [in convalescent care] I've had one 'Christian' conversation with a lady who wondered why no Sunday worship - why not indeed, when lay people can help out and there is an old boy in residence with a piano? The mid-week Holy Communion well attended was very dry BCP, lacking joy. A shambles really... I realise that getting zero response from a congregation (whatever age) must be disheartening... Yet I could weep. We all need simplicity, compassion and loving one-to-one attention to combat this great wall of loneliness pervading the place. Is everyone too tired to bother, can we not just BE rather than going through the old traditional rituals of the church, unless it is alive and kicking? Body and mind may be failing, but the Spirit, God's beautiful Holy Spirit, can never be quenched: don't let the curtains be drawn, the candles blown out, for Brightest and Best of the sons of the morning is here, the eternal True Light. God is outside knocking and no one is saying please come in to lighten our darkness. We need to be bold and shine in this twilight, through love and humour, never minding if we look complete idiots for Christ. Let's say it as it is folks. Sing 'What a Friend we have in Jesus' in the shower or in the lift: someone might just join in and where two or three are gathered there He is. ”

“ Our once-a-month Thursday afternoon Service seemed to be very popular with the majority of residents – held in the Dining Room (tables pushed back) – they would form a large circle for our 'Hymn Sandwich'. Here again many of our 30 residents would be joined by families and friends.

Hymns were usually 4 – from my 'home-made' A4 large print book, designed for easy use and constructed according to liturgical seasons of the year which proved very useful to those with the many difficulties that occur in the elderly or stroke victims. The Bible Readings (modern versions) were

either seasonal or themed, as were the decorations often made by residents and staff that would adorn the tables. It was very important for me to find an additional reading, either poetry or prose, that would help to encourage residents to think outside their 'comfort zone'. For example, one Good Friday I used readings from Amnesty International about genocide in Rwanda, another time from Elie Wiesel's 'Night', on his experience in a Nazi concentration camp. During spring and at Harvest time our thoughts would centre on the wonder of God's creation – the beauty of the earth. ”

Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to today's session?

Are there other people within the church, and/ or organisations outside the church, who would help us respond?

Returning:

Sing 'What a Friend we have in Jesus', or another song/ hymn to celebrate being held in God's love

Then:

Lord Jesus, we hold in your presence the older people we know
[name aloud people we know]...

May we treasure their part in our community,

and we hold in your presence people in residential and nursing homes locally *[name aloud those we know]...*

May we treasure their part in our community,

also people developing or living with dementia and their carers
[name aloud those we know]...

May we treasure their part in our community, Amen.

Session 4: Going on with God

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of Matthew 11:28-30, Luke 18:25 and Luke 2:36-38 for reading aloud

People differ in their spiritual style

(the things which help them to go on with God). Some people are more auditory or visual than word-based in the way they understand and express things. Pictures and music can communicate things in a different way from words. Some people are more kinaesthetic in their style – that is, they understand and express themselves best through activity and action.

This session aims to explore different ways to go on with God (and not be bored!) and different ministries and service that may come from greater life experience.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we in ourselves? In the whole group share one thing about today and one thing that you remember from the last session – if you decided there was something for you to do from last time, how did you get on? This is a time to welcome what each person says rather than discuss it, unless the speaker requests a response.

Introduction to today's session: As at other stages of life, human beings are not the same! This means that what helps us to go on with God may not be the same as what helps others. In addition, the limitations and challenges of older life can mean that prayer and spiritual practices have to change but also that there may be new ways to express love and faith with others. Here are two experiences:

“ I lost my beloved husband after looking after him for a very long time... We had just on 50 years together and although there were tough times looking after him during the final months, I can truly say it was a privilege to be his wife. My prayer life changed latterly and I found formal prayer and Bible reading hard, but I always woke singing the Lord's praises knowing He was ultimately in charge of the day, in case I doubted! Family and friends prayed ceaselessly for us both and he died most graciously at home seeing angels round his bed. We all felt so blessed. Now I am back in church for a full sacramental life and at home try to emulate Brother Lawrence in practising the Presence of God in all I do and [I] am conscious that He is with me. My singing and the abundant awareness of His wonderful creation round me continue to bring me joy... My tears come now when I see other folk struggling in a similar position and I feel Jesus' compassion again. Then I, in turn, am able to pray for them silently that they might have strength and that they might know the Source of that strength. I have to add that this journey is not altogether a picnic. Bereavement on being a widow or a widower is like nothing else. No wonder it is frequently mentioned in the

Christians on Ageing

say 'Spiritual care covers a wide range: support for communal worship, private prayer, moral guidance, exploration of theological and philosophical ideas and beliefs, scriptural exegesis, individual counselling – and, in some Churches, sacramental engagement in many important stages of life. The emphasis in each of the Churches is different, reflecting their traditions and development, and the demands made on Church leadership will vary from almost total obedience to accepted forms to complete freedom of expression. Clearly, there are many ways of providing and receiving spiritual care, but there is no single right way.

www.christiansonageing.org.uk

Bible. Jesus understood and continues to do so. ”

“ Whilst it important [for me] to pray regularly at home and alone using set prayers which over 80 years I know by heart, these sometimes become too familiar necessitating the need for 'off the cuff' additions according the needs of those included in these prayers.

More and more I feel it is very important and necessary to make time 'to be quiet' to make time to listen to God he is always there for us and if we listen he will help us to do his will here on earth.

... [Also] through organizing (for the past 16 years) a small Bible Study group, we all find it is a very useful point of contact with other likewise interested folk – working in turn on an exegesis of the following week's three readings – a good vehicle for the exchange biblical points of view and the continual discovery of new facts.

I maintain that it is totally impossible to stop – learning something new every day. ”

- What do you find helpful in going on with God now (e.g. in prayer, in study, in silence, in activity, on your own, with others)?
- How has your service/ ministry to other people changed over the years?

Receiving: Jesus encourages and reassures people, but also challenges them. The Bible also gives examples of people who were faithful in prayer and worship.

Someone read aloud Matthew 11:28-30. Pause to take it in.

Someone else read aloud Luke 18:25. Pause to take it in.

Someone else read aloud Luke 2:25-38.

Reflecting: In silence, spend about 5-10 minutes with these passages. Read them through again. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you as an older person and/or caring for older people. At the end of the time, the leader reads aloud the passages once more.

Share and discuss: what did you notice during this?

From these Bible passages:

- How might we know God's encouragement, God's challenge, and continue in worship and service?
- What might this mean in terms of prayer, study, silence, activity, being on one's own, being with others?

**“ God’s
comforting
presence:**

Deuteronomy 33.27, ‘underneath are the everlasting arms’.

Challenge: Luke 13.24, Jesus calls his followers to ‘make every effort to enter through the narrow door.’ ”

Cursillo is an opportunity for Christians to grow in God through Jesus Christ, primarily over one long weekend, and with the support of others who have made a Cursillo themselves.

[www.cofesuffolk.org]

Living Prayer 1 and **Living Prayer 2** (in the Living Faith in Suffolk series) aim to help groups explore praying, and praying in different ways.

Growing Roots

[<http://www.cofesuffolk.org/prayer-and-spirituality>] gives different people’s experiences of prayer and going on with God.

Responding: In the light of what we have shared so far, in growing older, and/ or caring for people growing older:

- How can we help ourselves/ others to go on with God?

Here is an example:

“ It is tempting to go on sitting in a chair and I find that I need to have an inner dialogue with myself to get up and do something.

The Bible is full of examples of this inner dialogue.

Psalm 103.1, ‘Praise the Lord, O my soul’: When I feel the last thing I want to do is to praise God in my prayer time because I do not feel like it, this psalm is a great help to get me started.

Paul speaks about his inner dialogue. He spells this out in Romans 7.14-25 about his struggle in his own self between good and evil: ‘For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind...’

Old people are just as prone with age of this struggle, as I believe Paul was throughout his life. ”

- What can be done with others to help going on with God?

One example is to go on a Cursillo weekend (see box); here is another example, of a group helping one another:

“ ... Always at the centre of our worship was that God made us – God loves us – and that His love is undying – and that, as he loves us so, we much return that love. There are aspects of our worship that encourage thought – and draw so many into ‘effective listening’, opening up conversations in the end. Everyone has their own story and many a deep understanding they have never shown before. ”

- What will encourage people who can give little response?

Here is an example:

“ What should visitors do? Give people time. To begin with just to sit with them is good.

Talk to them about what is going on the community and in the church if they were members of one. This may help them not to feel isolated from the outside world.

Offer to read to them or to pray with them.

I have found that some illustrated bibles are helpful, because

they have pictures and they are easy to understand. Andrea Skevington's *The Lion Classic Bible* is an example.

Narrative stories some of the psalms are good to read.

The readings could focus on the presence of Christ with them, and the love of God for them. I found it helpful to relate the readings where possible to the Christian year, Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Lent, Advent, Holy Week.

The prayers are both personal extempore and well-known. Praying for God's Blessing on them and on their family and other residents.

Saying the Lord's Prayer, which they may well join in. ”

“ **Another Scripture** that has been an encouragement – 1 Peter 4:10-11 – ‘serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.’ ”

- What can older people, in particular, offer to the church and the world? For example: in speech (see Luke 2.25-38); in caring (see Introduction to today's session); in prayer for others (e.g. local schools, people in need, the wider world).
- Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to today's session?

Returning: Offer yourselves /your efforts to God in your own words and silence, summing them up in the Lord's prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

OR

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against
us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Session 5: Dying Well

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle and matches or song)
- 'Thoughts on death' quotes (Appendix 1)
- Bible
- Returning: Icon of Christ on the cross so that everyone can see. Also tea-lights (one for every person we want to pray for) on a tray/ stand or tiles and taper or matches

Suffolk Family Carers

provide information, advice and support to those who look after a family member or relative.

www.suffolkfamilycarers.org

Information and prayers

from the Guild of All Souls Chapel at Walsingham (www.guildofallsouls.org.uk) and the Church of England website (www.churchofengland.org/prayersatthetim eofdeath.aspx) has been of great help and guidance.

This session aims to explore our response to the idea of death and dying as older people and to consider how we can die well.

Note to the leader: this area is one of great sensitivity and needs care. A light touch is needed; though the subject is deep humour at times may be appropriate; there needs to be space for reflection and the group should understand that it is fine to take 'time out' if necessary.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we in ourselves? In the whole group share one thing about today and one thing that you remember from the last session – if you decided there was something for you to do from last time, how did you get on? This is a time to welcome what each person says rather than discuss it, unless the speaker requests a response.

Introduction to today's session:

“ I always attempt to do many things each day, with the result that my time keeping can be too tight. My late father, who respected punctuality, would say, 'You will be late for your own funeral,' to which my response was, 'Dad, I hope I am!' ”

For many death has been a taboo subject, perhaps because dying, or death, is feared. Often euphemisms are used as a way of softening talk of death, for example: passed away, asleep in Christ, departed, crossed the bar, fallen off their perch, gave up the ghost, kicked the bucket, slipped away, pushing up the daisies...

- How do you speak of death? – do you have a particular euphemism that you use?

Receiving: As a way into discussion, give out one each of the 'thoughts on death' quotes in Appendix 1 and discuss, in pairs or as a group, what is meant by the allocated quote and whether or not you agree with it.

What is death? Ask the group to think about the question for a few minutes and then respond. Their answers might include:

Marian Carter, *Dying to Live* (SCM Press, 2014) explores death, dying and bereavement. The book has both practical information and theological reflection, intended for Christian people caring for individuals who are dying, their carers and bereaved people.

Making a will is not absolutely necessary but if done will help the family. It need not be done with a solicitor though this may help. Some people bequeath certain possessions to particular recipients; others lay the possessions out in the home of the deceased and after the funeral invite the family over a cup of tea to talk and take what they would like. Don't worry about the things that you haven't done. **Power of Attorney** for some people is significant if a person is likely to suffer from dementia.

- A cessation of bodily functions
- A peaceful end rather like a sleep that continues
- A liberation
- The end of a journey
- A continuing of the walk with God

The Bible gives a vision for the future in which God is in the centre, holding everything, and Jesus has prepared a place for us.

Divide out the following Bible passages and alone or in pairs, look at the allocated passage: John 14:1-6; Revelation 7:15-17; Psalm 23; Revelation 21:1-4; Romans 8:38-39; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44.

Reflecting: In silence, spend about 5 - 10 minutes with your passage. Read it through again. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you as an older person, and/ or caring for older people.

Share and discuss: what did you notice during this?

From these Bible passages:

- What is God like?
- What is afterlife like?
- What questions are unanswered?

Responding: There are practical things to be done when approaching death, including making a will, care in illness, when 'do not resuscitate' should apply, and planning a funeral. Solicitors, charities (such as Age UK Suffolk), residential/ nursing homes, hospices and Funeral Services can help us in thinking through the decisions that need making. Relationships are also important and some peace about the future. Preparing this emotional and spiritual side might include putting something right with one's self/ soul and/ or with other people.

- What does it mean, to you, to 'die well'?
- What do you already know about the practical aspects of dying well?
- Looking back, what was important in your relationship with people who have died, for you to feel they died well?
- Where was God in any experience of someone dying well?
- In the light of what we have shared so far, in growing older, and/ or caring for people growing older, how can we be alongside people who are dying and their families/ friends?

Planning for the end of your life:

where would you like to be – home/ hospital/ hospice recognise that sometimes we have no choice. If you have a stroke/ heart attack would you want to be resuscitated? It is important to let someone know your wishes.

Planning your funeral

is a challenging thing to do, but it will release responsibility from friends and family at a very emotional time for them. You might like to choose hymns; music to listen to at the beginning and end of the service; readings – poems and/ or biblical passages. Decisions about being cremated or buried and the place of scattering of ashes and burial. Again let someone know where this is.

Here are two examples:

“ If an 'end of life' scenario was inevitable I would always be alerted and, if requested by the family, I would attend day or night and stay until the family arrived, offering prayers and/ or communion for the dying – the bereaved – indeed whatever the family needed. ”

“ Ann’s husband opened the door. We were meeting for the first time, following a phone call from Ann, recommended by a local churchperson who had got out of her depth with a request to help Ann plan her own funeral. Ann and her husband had lived in the village for ten years and were deeply committed to the community, painting the bench in the Millennium playground, mowing the church yard, serving coffee at the church coffee morning, though neither said they had a faith.

I asked Ann to tell me about herself and later about her illness which, after diagnosis, had quickly become terminal. The couple had family, hymns were not necessary, there could be music to listen to, a meditation might replace prayers. Ann insisted that since members of the church would be present there must be hymns and the Lord’s prayer. I left leaving my funeral folder which contained hymns, prayers and readings, feeling blessed by a courageous lady. On a further occasion Ann asked what dying was like, and what happened after. ”

- How can we stand beside someone like Ann?
- What can we say about dying?
- What can we, as Christians, say about life beyond death to someone who does not share our faith?

Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to today’s session?

Is there a next step for you, as an individual, or this group, in response to this course?

Returning: Looking at an icon of Christ on the Cross, in 2 minutes of silence bring to mind people (maybe including yourself) who need reconciliation, who are dying and/ or who are bereaved.

In turn, each person for prays one or two people, praying for each in a word or phrase, lighting a tea-light (with taper from the ritual candle if you have one – and with help from others if needed), and saying at the end of each prayer,

Making a story book or a memory box the story book can be very helpful for the person writing or giving your obituary and can include dates, photos and reminiscences and / or very personal items. The box can be brought out by the family on special occasions.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend his/ her/ my spirit.

When all have prayed:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;
and by thy great mercy defend us
from all perils and dangers of this night;
for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

APPENDIX 1: 'THOUGHTS ABOUT DEATH' QUOTES

"I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."
Woody Allen

"Pale death beats equally at the poor man's gate and at the palaces of kings."
Horace

"It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live."
Marcus Aurelius

"If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live."
Martin Luther King Jr

"I intend to live forever, or die trying."
Groucho Marx

"Some people are so afraid to die that they never begin to live."
Henry Van Dyke

"There's something about death that is comforting, the thought that you could die tomorrow frees you to appreciate your life now."
Angeline Joli