



## Devotions

### A How to Guide for Spiritual Inquiry in Elderhood

Curated devotional materials provide encouragement during changing seasons of life, allowing older adults to engage more deeply in religious, spiritual, and personal discernment during this multi-phase stage of life. Older adulthood or elderhood is an elongated season of life in which older adults experience a variety of transitions, particularly with their use of time.

#### A Time for Every Season

In this season of life, older adults are graced with the freedom to explore and engage more deeply in the "Big Questions" of life, spirituality, faith formation and traditions. Older adults are gifted with time:

- \* Time to contemplate faith more intentionally,
- \* Time to ponder what Holy Scripture is saying to them in this stage of life,
- \* Time to consider the meaning and importance of their religious identity,
- \* Time to mourn significant losses in life,
- \* Time to experience significant transitions in life and discern meaning,
- \* Time to challenge faith/religious assumptions,
- \* Time to re-imagine their Baptismal identity in Christ, and
- \* Time to ponder what the Spirit is leading them to do and to become.

#### Importance of Devotions

Devotions provide a safe place to contemplate, ponder, wonder, gain new perspective, and pray about one's on-going relationship with the divine and aid with spiritual well-being. "Spiritual well-being is being on friendly terms with God" as stated by Thorson in *"Perspectives on Spiritual Well-being and Aging," 2000*. Well designed, thoughtful and engaging devotions provide this friendly space.

Devotions can be explored as a personal, private journey. Simultaneously, devotions can be the springboard for conversation and dialogue, a jumping-off point for spiritual reflection with a conversation partner, lessening isolation, anxiety, and providing a new lens or framework by which to navigate this season of life.

Devotions are not designed to be a sermon or an elongated study. Rather, carefully curated devotions allow older adults to apply the wisdom they have experienced through life to Holy Scripture, allowing for self-exploration, deep contemplation and growth, acknowledging God's presence in the midst of their journey.

## Creating a Devotion

When creating a devotion, it is important to set parameters that promote consistency. Consider the following:

- AUDIENCE:** How do you define older adulthood/elderhood in your congregational/faith setting?  
Who will this devotion target? Early, Middle, Late Elderhood?  
*(As explored by Martinson in [Elders Rising](#))*  
Will it focus on a particular denominational theology or Christian tradition?
- SETTING:** Will it be developed for all older adults within a congregational setting?  
Will it serve an older adult population outside the church walls?  
Will it be distributed by Deacons to shut-ins?  
Will it be a resource in an Adult Bible School class?
- FREQUENCY:** Will the devotional material be produced monthly, quarterly, seasonally?  
Consider following the liturgical seasons and calendar, as each liturgical season lends itself to particular themes, religious celebrations, and feast days.  
*([The Christian Year Liturgical Guide](#) and [2024 Liturgical Colors Calendar](#) )*
- THEMES:** What will be the focus of the devotional material?  
A book of the Bible,  
A chapter of the Bible,  
A verse of the Bible,  
Religious poetry, sacred hymn, prayers, spiritual practices, or  
Verses of the Bible that form a theme - for example: discipleship, gratitude, peace, time, love, community, stewardship, wisdom.
- The 3-year lectionary cycle is a helpful guide.  
*([Revised Common Lectionary](#))*
- FORMAT:** A consistent format aids in setting expectations and anticipates future editions. Keeping a consistent layout, design, and graphics will make the devotion welcoming and receptive.
- Consider using a template from a writing application like Microsoft Word, for example, a booklet design.
- Take into consideration font type, size, and color as some are more kind to aging eyes.
- Consider including visuals. Visuals help to contextualize as well as aid visual learners.
- Consider inserting QR codes to add music and artwork.  
*(Use a QR generator like [this](#))*

## Devotional Content Suggestions

Lectionary Seasons	Topic/Theme	Scriptural References
<b>Season of Advent</b>	Prologue to Christmas	John Chapter 1 Verses: 1-3, 3b-5, 14
	Prepare the way of the Lord	Isaiah 40:3-5; Luke 1:5-25 Mark 1:18
<b>Season After Epiphany</b>	Jesus Teaches Us to Pray	Luke 3:21-22; Luke 6:12-16; Luke 9:28-36
	Our Communal Identity	1 Corinthians, Chapter 1 Verses 1-9, 10-18, 18-31
<b>Season of Lent</b>	God's Steadfast Love Spans Our Years	Psalms 71, selected verses
	Psalms for Lent	Psalms 91, 27, and 32
<b>Season of Easter</b>	John's Epilogue: Go Fish, Go Follow, Go Feed!	John 21, selected verses
	Equipped	John 20, selected verses
<b>Season After Pentecost</b>	Attributes of God	Psalms 139, 145, 78
	Pondering Sacredness	Psalms 8, selected verses
<b>Ordinary Time</b>	Wisdom	Ecclesiastes 3, selected verses
	Rejoice in Faith	Philippians, Verses: 1:3; 2:1-13; 4:1-9

## Sample Devotional Material

Permission is granted to reproduce the example journal entitled "Jarvie Journal: Ordinary Time" found on this POAMN "Expressions of Older Adult Ministry" website.

## Resources Cited:

- Martinson, Roland D. "Elders Rising: The Promise and Peril of Aging," Fortress Press, 2018.
- Thorson, J.A. "Perspectives on Spiritual Well-being and Aging," Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 2000.

## Works that inspire (beyond Holy Scripture)

- Brown, Lerita C., "What Makes You Come Alive: A Spiritual Walk with Howard Thurman," Broadleaf Books, 2023.
- Foster R. and James S., "Devotional Classics: Selected Readings For Individual & Groups," Renovare, 1993 edition.
- Stoner, Marcia J., "Seasons of Faith: Teaching the Christian Year for Intergenerational Use," Abingdon Press, 2003.
- Thompson, Marjorie J., "Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life," Westminster John Knox, 1995.

Writer: Rev. Shelley Gardner, Jarvie Chaplain through the Board of National Mission and the Presbyterian Foundation. (Learn more about the Jarvie Program serving older adults at <https://www.jarvie.org>)

POAMN: [www.poamn.org](http://www.poamn.org) Office of Christian Formation: [www.pcusa.org/formation](http://www.pcusa.org/formation)

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