



SPIRITUAL CARE

SERIES

EPISODE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE AGEING JOURNEY

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

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Episode Topics

EPISODE 1: Understanding the Ageing Journey

EPISODE 2: Spirituality in Ageing

EPISODE 3: Good Communication

EPISODE 4: The Power of Storytelling

EPISODE 5: Dementia

EPISODE 6: A New Home and a New Way of Life

EPISODE 7: Loss, Grief, Death and Dying

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Episode 1 Outline: Understanding the Ageing Journey

KEY THEMES OF SESSION

MEANINGFUL AGEING

OUR BIOLOGICAL AND
SPIRITUAL STORY IN AGEING

ROLE OF A SPIRITUAL CARER

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES FOR PARTICIPANTS

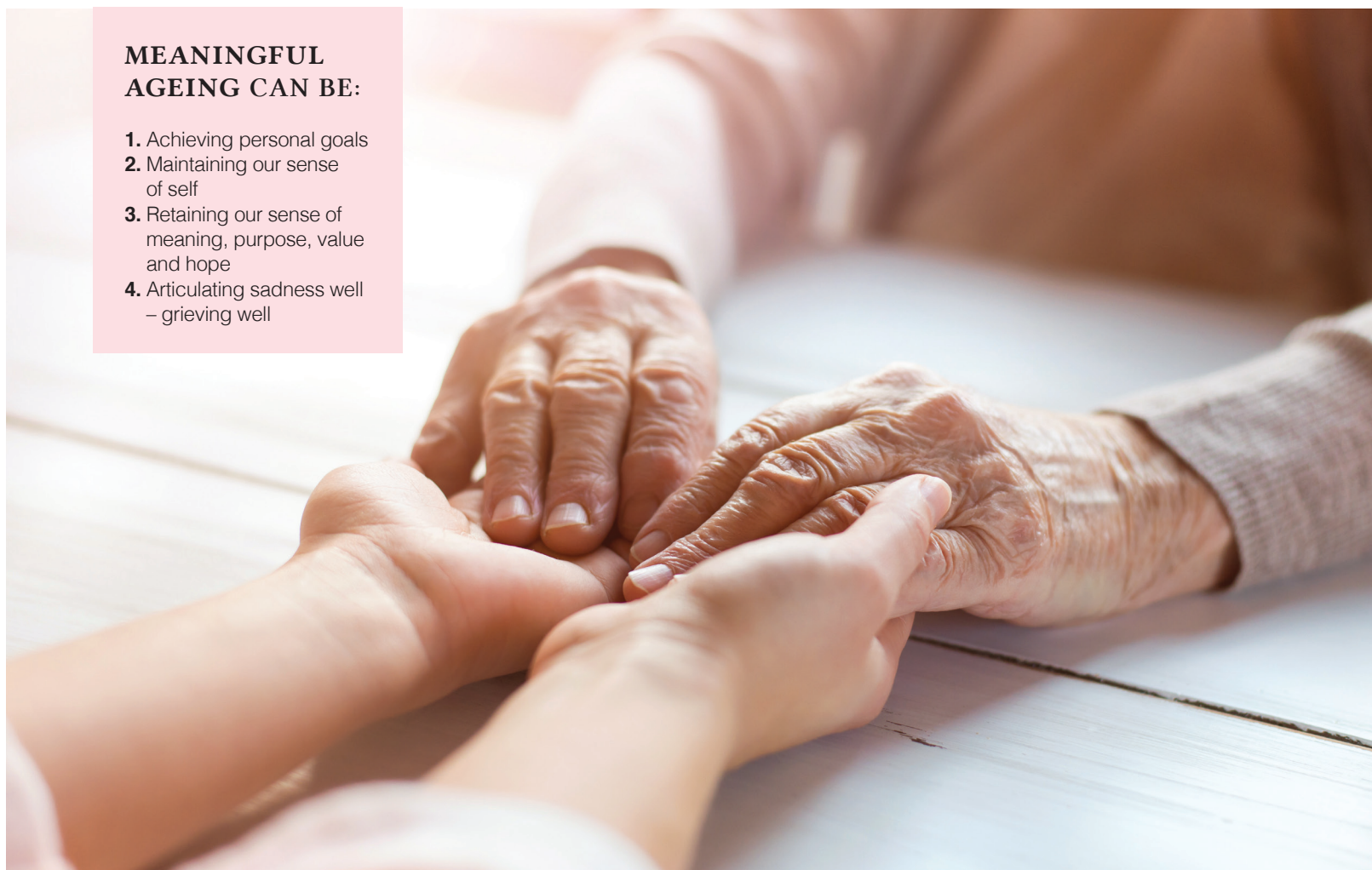
PERSONAL AGEING
JOURNEY REFLECTION

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

REFLECTION AND PRE-WORK

MEANINGFUL AGEING CAN BE:

- 1.** Achieving personal goals
- 2.** Maintaining our sense of self
- 3.** Retaining our sense of meaning, purpose, value and hope
- 4.** Articulating sadness well – grieving well





Devotion: Seasons of Life



You have been allocated a season as a group. Read the Bible text for your season and answer the questions allocated to your group.

GROUP 1: SPRING – SEASON FOR LEARNING MATTHEW 19 VS. 13 TO 15

“Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said: ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.”

QUESTION:

Why would Jesus say ‘*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*’? What do children bring that we could learn from?

GROUP 2: SUMMER – SEASON OF EARNING JOSHUA 1 VS. 7 TO 9

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you.

QUESTION:

In this passage, Joshua is being advised by God at the start of his leadership role. What guidelines does this passage encourage young adults (at their career stage of life) to do?



GROUP 3: AUTUMN – SEASON OF RETURNING
JAMES 4 VS. 1 – 3

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

QUESTION:

As illustrated in this passage, what types of issues arise in the middle age period of life (e.g. when in a mid-life crisis).

GROUP 4: WINTER - SEASON OF REAPING AND GRIEVING
JOHN 21 VS. 18 (JESUS SPEAKING TO PETER)

“I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.”

QUESTION:

As outlined for Peter, how does this passage relate to a person in old age.



Organisation's Vision and Purpose



Note here your course organisation's:

» **Vision or Mission**

» **Purpose and Values**



Introduction to Ageing



QUALITIES THAT MAKE UP A GOOD SPIRITUAL CARER

1. Awareness of my personal spirituality or my own personal faith in God
2. Ability to be self-reflective and open to personal growth
3. Compassionate heart
4. Hold a strong, positive regard for older people – respect and value others
5. Willingness to listen, not talk
6. An openness to, and acceptance of others' beliefs and values



Your notes on *Introduction to Ageing* (video discussion):

1. Why do you think western cultures tend to push older people to the margins of society?

2. What is Ageism?

3. How do we have to adapt as a society if we are going to really care for older people?

True / False Quiz (optional)



SELECT TRUE OR FALSE FOR EACH QUESTION

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|--|
| TRUE | FALSE | 1. The 'Autumn' season is a time of earning and building relational connections |
| TRUE | FALSE | 2. A spiritual carer has the ability to be self-reflective and open to personal growth. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 3. To offer quality of life to older people, we should only give them respect and dignity, if we have time. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 4. During the 'Winter' season, a major struggle for older people is their loss of choice and decision making. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 5. Western cultures marginalise older people as it places a high value on their economic contribution. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 6. Older people have a purpose as they bring wisdom and experience. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 7. Ageism is a progressive loss of capability as we grow older. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 8. The ageing process is a natural and progressive one that everyone has to go through. |
| TRUE | FALSE | 9. An effective spiritual carer understands the importance of being aware of their personal spirituality or their own personal faith in God. |





Personal Reflection on Growing Older



Your notes on *Meaningful Ageing* (video discussion):

1. What are the delights of growing old from your perspective?
2. What are the limitations of growing old?
3. What has been your ageing journey so far?
4. What do you envisage for your own ageing journey? What are your fears and hopes?



Meaningful Ageing



Your notes on *Meaningful Ageing* (video discussion):

1. What is meaningful ageing?
2. How do we help people retain their sense of purpose and self-worth?
3. What practical things can we do to help people express and process their sadness?

Seasons of Life (optional)

Seasons of Life is a concept of the stages of life that people experience.

SEASONS/STAGES OF LIFE

1. SPRING: THE SEASON OF LEARNING (PHYSICAL STAGE)

We enter this world and begin exploring and learning about our surroundings. Babies discover their hands; learn to grasp things and learn to crawl and walk. Positive role models are important. Our first 20 years are primarily focussed on learning and developing our identity. This is largely a physical time of growth — experiencing and learning through senses, e.g. touch, taste, hear, see, smell.

2. SUMMER: THE SEASON OF EARNING (MENTAL)

It is in this season that we begin to build a life. We may find our life partner, start a family, seek or buy a home and begin to accumulate possessions. In this season the focus is usually on us. This season may be a difficult one if a person remains single but would like a partner/family. As we build our careers we gain valuable experience to help us in work and life. Also known as mental development stage or career development stage.

3. AUTUMN: THE SEASON OF RETURNING (EMOTIONAL AND RELATIONAL)

At some point, most of us will begin to tire of the pace of our *earning season* or a significant life event will lead us to question: “Is there something more to life?” We may achieve our goals and make it to the top and, having climbed the ladder of success, we realise it was leaning against the wrong building. During this season relationships become more important and emotional development with it.

4. WINTER: THE SEASON OF REAPING (SPIRITUAL)

This is the season of reaping and/or loss. It is during this season, late in life, we have the opportunity to see the results of our efforts in the successes of others we’ve helped along the way or in the success of initiatives we helped to start. It is also the season of loss, where we can lose our life’s partner, friends, family and our health. The Winter season can also give us an opportunity to continue to flourish spiritually.



Small Group Activity on Seasons of Life (optional)



1. What is important to notice about the 'winter' season?

2. What issues are people processing in this season?

Reflection on Meaningful Ageing



Having viewed the video clip, individually reflect on the question below and write your response:

What could you do to encourage your own meaningful ageing?



Two Stories in Life



Your notes on *Two Stories in Life* (video discussion):

1. What is important about the biological story for a person who is ageing?

2. What is important about the spiritual story for a person who is ageing?



3. What did you learn about the inter-relationship between the biological and the spiritual story when a person is ageing?
4. What practical insights did you get for spiritual carers to support the biological and the spiritual story of older people in your care?



Small Group Debriefing Activity



In your group,

1. First, BRIEFLY discuss your understanding of the first three questions from the previous exercise 'Two Stories in Life'.
2. Compile a list of practical insights on being a spiritual carer from your notes on question 4 from the previous exercise 'Two Stories in Life'. Your group will be asked to share this with the main group.

Ageing Well – Radio National

AN INTERVIEW BY CARMEL HOWARD WITH ELIZABETH MACKINLAY

ELIZABETH MACKINLAY: We have not, until fairly recently, had the gift of so many people, being able to live longer, and so in a way this later life has been relatively unexplored. Often, we still hear the language of the burden of ageing, the negative things about growing older. But I believe that we need to be looking at ways that we can enable more people to live a fruitful, resilient, flourishing later life that is full of meaning.

CARMEL HOWARD: The question of what it means to nourish the soul is at the heart of Reverend Elizabeth MacKinlay's research into the spiritual dimension of ageing. She's Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies and Professor of Theology at Charles Sturt University. Her work has included extensive interviewing of older people and she's identified some core spiritual tasks of later life.

ELIZABETH MACKINLAY: I looked for themes: what were the important things that these older people were talking about? And the most important thing was where they found meaning in their lives. And that finding ultimate meaning or final meanings in life is a really critical task for people. And this is something that is very special, when I have the opportunity to accompany a person who is in the process of dying and journeying with them as they discover what has been the meaning of my life and being able to put that into a sense that is acceptable to them and to those they love.

So that's a central thing; meaning in life. Without meaning we have no hope and we can succumb to mental illnesses in that way, depression and so forth. But it's out of what lies at the centre of our being, where we find our meaning, that we respond to all of life, we have a sense of really important relationships with loved ones.

Or for the elderly, who have lost their most important life-long relationships, it may be that God becomes the centre of their being and the centre of meaning for them. But what is that God like? If the person has an image of a God who is a judgemental God, and they feel that they can't measure up to what that God expects, then they're going to respond to life out of that. They may be bitter, they may be angry. They may be feeling that they are worthless.

And that's the way they will respond to all of life. But for the person who finds hope in their God, or in close human relationships, what lies at the core of their being will give them the positive outlook on life that will help them to meet the challenges and to respond to those. And people may well respond through creation, or the environment, through religion as well as relationships. Or it's art, it's music it's drama, it's prose, it's poetry, it's dance.

All of these ways in which human beings can express themselves. And the creativity that comes out of this is part of engaging with the spiritual and asking questions about why are we here, what's the meaning of life?

I found that all of the people I interviewed, independent living people, when I asked them, 'do you have any fears as you face your future?' they all said, 'I fear becoming dependent. I fear facing a death that will be painful that I can't control.' So there was this sense of 'What if I become vulnerable?

What if I can't be self-sufficient?' And this is a very big issue for many older people. Seventy per cent of the people I spoke with said that they feared dementia and I hadn't mentioned dementia at all. But there are so many myths out there about that.

The task, as people grow older, is not to eliminate suffering from the life experience



ELIZABETH MACKINLAY

Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies at St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra. She is both a registered nurse and a priest in the Anglican Church. She is a Professor in the School of Theology at Charles Sturt University, and an active researcher and writer. She has presented many papers and workshops, including keynote addresses both nationally and internationally. Her publications include *The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing*, and a number of edited books.



“What is important about the spiritual journey for me is that it takes account of the fact that the person may be moving to a time when they are unable to do things anymore, but they are still important as a human being. Elizabeth MacKinlay

or to eliminate loss and disabilities. The task is to transcend these. To be able to move beyond the self, and in fact, Victor Frankl had a lovely way of expressing this. He talked about self-forgetting. That the person wasn't self-focussed but was able to forget about themselves, really reaching out in love to others. And this is something that some people find easier than others to actually develop. And I think we can help with that pastorally. We still need more research in this area and it's an important area for development.

As well as that, I've identified moving from 'provisional life meanings' to 'final life meanings.' Victor Frankl was important in this as he identified the fact that, as we move through life, we assign meanings to our life experiences, either intentionally or sometimes fairly unconsciously, depending on what the events are. And he said life's rather like making a movie. You shoot the individual frames of the movie. And it's not until you are faced with your own mortality that you suddenly can play the whole movie for the first time.

When you put all the frames together and play the movie you are able to see the relationship between events in your life and suddenly you get these 'aha' experiences: 'That's what that meant back there and I never realised it before.' Or even, indeed, needing to move back to look for forgiveness, reconciliation. These are powerful and important things for people moving into their later years to deal with and to come to a growing sense of their lives being worthwhile.

Another one of the tasks, for people in later life, because of the loss that naturally comes, it's important for them to be able to establish new intimacies, new relationships. And I use the term intimacy in its broadest term; the need to love and be loved by others and known as I am. And this does not only

involve sexual aspects, in fact it might not be a sexual knowing at all. But it's a depth of intimacy with other human beings which is vital for the nourishment and wellbeing of people, no matter what age they are. If we're going to flourish and be resilient we need to be in community with others, not isolated.

What is important about the spiritual journey for me is that it takes account of the fact that the person may be moving to a time when they are unable to do things anymore, but they are still important as a human being. Taking a theological approach, if we understand the human being as made in the image of God, God loves us regardless of whether we are doing anything or not. God just loves us because we are. And to me that says it's ok just to 'be', even when we can't 'do'.

CARMEL HOWARD: Reverend Professor Elizabeth MacKinlay. Like others we've heard from in the program, her work has also drawn on Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. After Erikson died at the age of 92, his wife and colleague, Joan Erikson, refined a final stage in the lifespan which she published as *The Life Cycle Completed*. Elizabeth MacKinlay explains further.

ELIZABETH MACKINLAY: They've added a ninth stage 'gerotranscendence', where they look at the frailty that comes maybe in your 80s or 90s or older. Where life becomes more precarious. You know, some of my friends who are at that stage of life say to me from time to time, if I'm wanting to have lunch with them, that they may have to dip out at the last minute because they're just not really well today and can't do it. Life becomes more precarious.

And so this ninth stage, this time of frailty, they've suggested that in fact

sometimes there's struggle involved in this, that it is not easy. Hence the expression that ageing is not for sissies. You grow in this but you grapple with issues. It might be better to talk about that ninth stage as reversing the ways because the positive comes first in all the eight stages that Erikson set out.

It's integrity versus despair, or in the earlier stages trust versus distrust. It's despair versus integrity. It can be easier for people who are living with a lot of chronic illnesses and diagnoses which make life much more difficult for them, it may be easy for them to come down on the side of despair rather than integrity.

And it seems to me that the spiritual underlies all of this. And in my work, actually, I defined a spiritual integrity, which has got to do with a sense of being able to accept one's self, one's attitudes, one's values. It's realising your limitations. Learning to live with ambiguities and accepting uncertainty in life. We often hear people talk about 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks,' that old people don't change. But hey, older people are changing all the time.

Even if they may not wish to. Health changes, residence changes, relationship changes. All of these things. Change is a constant part of ageing.

CARMEL HOWARD: According to Elizabeth MacKinlay, reflection in later life can be especially beneficial when it's intentional and facilitated through programs of 'spiritual reminiscence.'

ELIZABETH MACKINLAY: What we have done is develop this process of spiritual reminiscence where we are looking at the life meaning against the person's life story. Using various strategies to look at events across their lives. We can do this in all sorts of



community settings. And we have taken this a step further. We've done quite a bit of research in using this process with people who have dementia as well. And it works very well for them as well. And if you're working with a group of people in spiritual reminiscence, you can ask them also about the deeper things of their life. It may be that through this process, healing and wholeness can come. We've also found as we've worked both in community settings and in residential aged care that this is a really great process for people who perhaps are isolated in the community; getting to know people and deepening friendships. And it's a very special time. It allows each person to share of their story and it's really good to be able to tell your story and know that it's being listened to by somebody else.

CARMEL HOWARD: You've been listening to Encounter on ABC Radio National, and a program called Ageing Well. My thanks to Elizabeth MacKinlay.

Radio National - 27 November 2011
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/ageing-well/3686464#transcript>

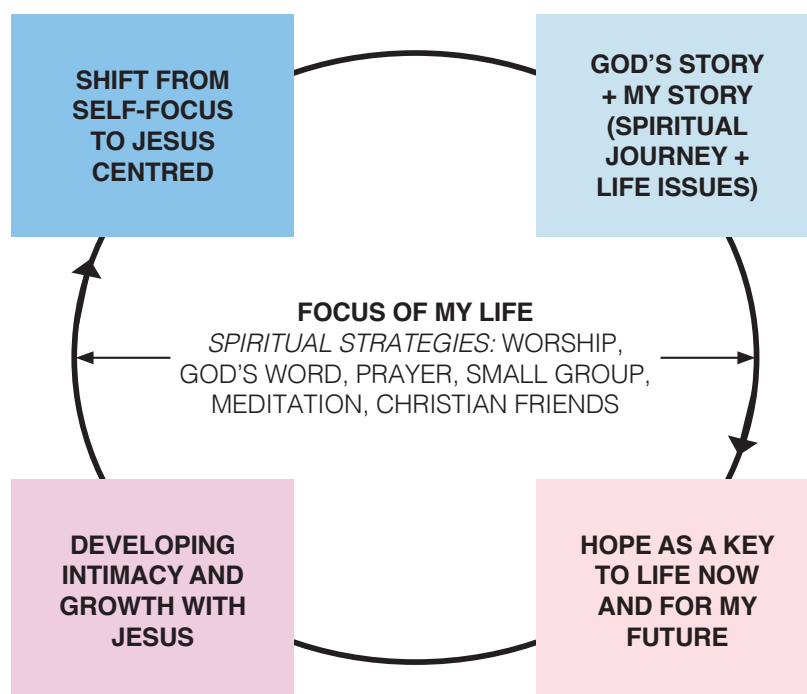
SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE AGEING PROCESS

Elizabeth MacKinlay notes the spiritual dimensions of ageing. The focus of our life's spirituality is our response to life and God. This expands to engage:

1. God's story and my story
2. Developing intimacy and growth with Jesus
3. Shift from self-focus to being Jesus centered
4. Hope as a key to life now and for my future

Each of these areas of our life are:

- » Interlinked and cross-supporting
- » Developed by the spiritual strategies we utilise





Seasons of Life: Practical Resources as we Grow Older

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY, WRITTEN BY ROSS WAKELEY

Forrest Gump is a great film. I'm sure we can all relate to this quote about life – “*Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.*”

Has your life been like that?

God's Word rightly tells us: *There is a right time for everything: A time to be born; a time to die; a time to plant; a time to harvest. A time to heal; a time to rebuild; a time to cry; a time to laugh and a time to grieve.* Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Come with me as we explore the **four Seasons of Life** and some **practical insights** to help us enjoy all God offers us in our life.

I've discovered that life brings us all times of pain, failure and grief, plus our struggles with fear, our worth and our identity. Those things can define us, if we allow them to. They can rob our joy and hope. *There is an alternative.* Surrender it all to Jesus. He will take that stuff that so easily robs us. We'll experience being loved by God so we can love God. We'll walk free, to better look at life and love other people, as God enables us to have the same perspective as Jesus does.

SPRING: THE SEASON OF LEARNING

We enter this world and begin exploring and learning about our surroundings. Babies discover their hands; learn to grasp things and learn to crawl and walk. Our first 20 years are primarily focussed on learning and developing our identity.

This critical season of life shapes the *rest of our life*—

- » If our parents give us **dependable affection**, our view of the world will be one of trust. If that does *not* happen, a child may develop a sense of mistrust in people. That leads to frustration, suspicion, withdrawal and a lack of confidence.

- » Wise parents provide **encouragement**, so the child takes risks and learns independence, which builds confidence. However, we are fragile people: if we're “put down” as a child, we may develop shame and doubt about our ability to handle life and problems.

- » During the early teen years, boys and girls ask the question: “*Do I have what it takes? Do I have the courage, skills and friends to help me really make it in life?*” Parents are crucial in **validating** their son or daughter as teens often feel they *don't* have what it takes to be a man or woman.

- » Many fail to hear that deep encouragement. Too many hear:

“You are useless and you'll never make it!” That crushes the spirit of teens and they go into adulthood *looking* OK, but internally they are wounded and wanting *someone* to **validate** their worth and help give them an identity.

We now seek a **partner**...

- » Having established our identity, we're ready to make long-term commitments to others. We start forming **loving relationships**—*our parents are usually our role models.* We make the sacrifices that loving relationships require. If we have unresolved emotional damage from earlier stages of life, it will often undermine caring relationships and we may retreat into emotional isolation.

FREEDOM COMES AS I ACCEPT WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT ME—

GOD'S WORD: *What marvellous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. Let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism. God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.*

*Once that's done and we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God! **This is how God showed his love for us:** God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. Not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. If God loved us like this, we certainly ought to **love each other.***

1 John 3:1,18-21, 4:10,11

“The Greatest Fear in the world is of the opinions of others, and the moment you are unafraid of the crowd you are no longer a sheep, you become a lion. A great roar arises in your heart, the roar of freedom” Osho



An old man told his grandson, "There is a battle between two wolves inside all of us. One is Evil.

It is anger, jealousy, lies, resentment, greed, ego and inferiority. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth."

The boy thought about it and asked, "Grandfather, which wolf wins?"

"The one you feed," he said.

SUMMER: THE SEASON OF EARNING

It is in this season that we begin to build a life. We may find our life partner, start a family, buy a home and begin to accumulate possessions. In this season, the *focus is usually on us*. In building our careers, we gain valuable experience to help us in work and life.

If we are *wise*, we'll have already discovered that *quality of life*—for now and eternity—is secured through a fair dinkum friendship with Jesus. That will shape how we invest our time, skills and money.

In a culture where the media 'preach' our worth comes from things, many walk the road of self-reliance. We use our career to develop our worth by improving our personal "brand image." Life is rushed: we give the bulk of our energy to moving onward and upward.

If our identity and worth are *not* secure in God, we'll find we are vulnerable. Our children can emotionally manipulate us—they may *actually* drive the decisions we make, as we want our family and friends to think: "Wow, look at how successful they are."

A healthy marriage involves *leaving* our childhood at home. As Genesis 2:24 says: *A man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh*. Our relationships are stronger as—

- » We choose to **give**, rather than take.
- » **Forgive**, rather than hold grudges.
- » As we **ask questions** of those with godly wisdom, we are enriched.
- » Celebrate life, **honour** people and have an attitude of humility.



WORKING THROUGH ISSUES

Nick is a true inspiration. Born in 1982 with no arms or legs, this Aussie guy could easily have allowed his physical disability to define him. Nick chooses to allow God to actively help him daily overcome his issues and help others.

"I have the choice to be angry at God for what I don't have or be thankful for what I do have" Nick Vujicic

- » Rest **secure** in God's love for us so in our emotional security, we can serve.

During this season, the transition from learning to earning can be challenging. We'll have stuffups. People will wound us.

Internally, as we continue to deal with our emotional issues, God will brilliantly help us, as we welcome his love and strength.

NICK VUJICIC SAYS:

"Faced with countless challenges and obstacles, God has given me the strength to surmount what others might call impossible. My life is given to sharing this same hope and genuine love that I have personally experienced with people all over the globe. I've been invited into very unexpected places to share about my faith in Jesus Christ and literally millions have responded.

Travelling to over 44 countries, I've been extremely humbled by the opportunities to introduce Jesus to those I meet. Psalm 139:13,14 says, "*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*"

In countless schools, churches, prisons, orphanages, hospitals and in face-to-face encounters with individuals, I get to tell them how precious they are to God."

For more: www.lifewithoutlimbs.org

AUTUMN: THE SEASON OF RETURNING

At some point, most of us will begin to tire of the pace of our *earning season* or a significant life event will lead us to question: "Is there something more to



GENERATIONAL ATTITUDES IN WORK AND LIFE

	VETERANS (1922-45)	BOOMERS (1946-64)	GENERATION X (1965-80)	GENERATION Y (1981-2000)
WORK ETHIC AND VALUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Hard work » Respect for authority » Sacrifice » Duty first » Stick to rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Workaholics » Efficient » Fight issues » Personal fulfilment » Seek quality » Question authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Eliminate task » Self-reliance » Like structure and direction » Sceptical » Often cynical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » What's next? » Multi tasking » Tenacity » Entrepreneur » Tolerant » Goal orientated
MAKING CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Formal » Letter/Memo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » In person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Direct » Immediate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Email » Voicemail
FEEDBACK REWARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » No news is good news » Satisfaction in job that's well done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » We don't appreciate it » Money » Title gives recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing? » Freedom is the best reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Whenever I want it, at the push of a button » Meaningful life

life?" We may achieve our goals and make it to the 'top' and, having climbed the ladder of success, we realise it was leaning against the wrong building.

At this point, we're at a crossroads. We call it a **mid-life crisis**. Some people miss the opportunity to evaluate their life and deal with their internal emotional stuff or relational issues. They continue to **focus on themselves**. They trade in their spouse for a newer model or seek to recapture their youth in other self-destructive ways. In doing, so they ruin families, friendships, careers and lives. *We've all seen this.*

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

Focussing on **significance** and **serving** into what matters in the **long term takes the focus off of us**. Discovering our **true worth** is from our friendship with God and it's nurtured by our spiritual journey (this is far more than just *doing church*). If we take this 'fork in the road', it will lead to character growth and joy, rather than self-destruction.

**We're all walking the journey of life.
Loving and being loved. We hope to leave
a positive legacy.**

We'll also be dealing with being part of the **"sandwich generation"**— a term used to describe the middle-aged generation squeezed between the *simultaneous demands* of caring for our ageing parents and also giving support to our children as they begin parenting. In addition, in the later stages of our working career, the **workplace** is radically changing. We can feel we're becoming redundant in a *digital world*.

In this season, we have an active life, but our *focus* is off things and more on relationships. We have opportunity to constructively work through any issues with our *parents* from our past, eg: resentment, anger and jealousy. Relationships transition with our *children*. We may find they need us less as their careers take off—causing a sense of rejection for us. We also need to guard against stagnation—our brain going into 'autopilot', when we need to rethink life's meaning.

PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS

Lord,
make me an instrument of
Your peace
Where there is hatred,
let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is error, truth
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console
To be understood,
as to understand
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive
it is in pardoning that we
are pardoned
And it is in dying that we
are born to eternal life.



O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up.

You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.

You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me.

You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there... even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me...even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my

mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous.

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!

And when I wake up, you are still with me!

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. **PSALM 139***

CRISIS POINTS IN OUR LIFE AT THIS SEASON MAY LEAD TO US:

- » Changing our job, spouse, or where we live
- » Leaving our church as it's not answering our life questions
- » Becoming depressed from menopause or singleness
- » Awareness that retirement and my final season is near. This triggers a search to ensure that after our life, we have left a significant legacy of people we've mentored or achievements that outlive us
- » Internal confusion, if my identity isn't secure or my emotional pain isn't resolved
- » Financial struggles that add tension to my next season

WINTER: THE SEASON OF REAPING

If we've looked to God or lived for others in earlier seasons, we get a bonus, the *season of reaping*. It is during this season, late in life, we have the opportunity to see the results of our efforts in the successes of others we've helped along the way or in the success of initiatives we helped to start.

The *winter season* is also the period of retirement, life as a senior citizen and our death. If we have worked through the *lessons of life* effectively; dealt with our emotional baggage and developed a deep confidence in God's goodness and love for us, then we're people who finish life well with deep contentment.

My dad retired in August 1991. He and mum have lived out the reality of their

faith in God by continuing to enjoy life, relationships and serving other people. They can be deeply content with life.

However, this winter season is the **major time of loss in our life**. We all face—

1. Loss of our youth
2. We lose our job and work connections
3. Loss of the world that has been familiar
4. Loss of our home as we shift to aged care
5. The loss of our independence
6. Loss of our sense of value to other people
7. Death comes and we lose spouse/friends
8. Decline in our health

In a culture where our *worth* is often valued for *what we do*, the final decades of our life are more difficult unless we are valued, loved and respected for **who we are** by people we love.

We walk the road *knowing* our value to God and *secure* in our friendship with Him.

Some **key issues** to navigate are to *first* ensure we don't allow our primary focus to be on **looking backwards**. If we do that all the time, we rob ourselves of looking **forward** to the new aspects of our life and eternity with Jesus.



It can be so easy to enjoy *being passive*—sleeping like our border collie. It is important to think and **plan for our future needs**. Stuff like *where we'll live*—the transition from family home to a self care village or aged care. It's easy to procrastinate and live day to day.

However, this frustrates our families, because we won't let any one help us tidy up our house; throw out decades of our accumulated stuff; or actively plan the next stage of our own care. Living in **denial of reality** means we have abdicated from being responsible, so we become a disaster waiting to happen. *Is that a wise choice?*

As we become senior citizens, we tend to slow down our productivity and explore life as a retired person. It is during this time that **we contemplate our life**. If we see our life as unproductive, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we may be dissatisfied with life and have a sense of despair, often leading to depression.

Studies show that the **effects of ageing are minimised by staying:**

- » mentally alert
- » intellectually curious
- » physically active

HOW?

- » A **healthy lifestyle**—body, spirit and mind—helps reduce stress and maintain health. There are activities

*Best way forward is always to **forgive them**.* In doing that we release our self and the other person from us wanting to hit back. We can't control what people do to us, but we can choose to not re-live that hurt. We can invite God to help us with the pain, give it to him—and our sense of injustice.

The world *is* imperfect. It always takes *two* to have a squabble. We can focus forwards and make the best of this winter season as we forgive. Let go of past stuff and give our self permission to enjoy life.

that cost little and can be done alone, or with friends, that give us a lift, and help us while dealing with emotional distress or mental illness.

- » We're wise to **maintain** our friendship with God; social customs; old relationships; family connections. We can also develop new relationships and be involved with our grandchildren. **Explore** community organisations, senior citizens centres, day respite programs, social support outings and church small groups or volunteer in the community, and *we gain* enjoyment from life.

- » Ensure we **don't confuse relationships with issues**.

Too often, I see a parent have a squabble with their adult child over an *issue*. In anger or frustration, the older adult breaks the relationship, e.g: "I'll cut you out of my will," or "don't come here anymore," etc.

COMMON EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS IN OUR WINTER SEASON

1. GRIEVING

There are numerous losses we adults face as we age. Changes in our economic, social and personal status related to our job; retirement; decline in health and the death of friends. The death of a spouse or other loved ones can be a profound loss, bringing on a grief process that may cause changes in our thinking, mood and behaviour.

There are phases of grieving:

Denial: We express disbelief or inability to acknowledge the loss of the person we love.

Anger: We get cranky loss happened to us. We're alone and we feel deserted.

Bargaining: To try and regain some normal life, we make "deals" in an effort to make life better for us.

Depression: We feel despair or hopelessness overcome us.

Acceptance: Over time, we move beyond the loss and begin to resume

our previous activities and behaviour.

How long it takes often depends on us being willing to grieve well. Let it out.

These stages are normal reactions to a loss, and should pass over time. If a person does not seem to get to the acceptance stage, or shows prolonged signs of depression (longer than two weeks), pop into your GP for a chat. While grief and loss is emotionally difficult, many older adults adapt to the changes in their life and regain a sense of joy and happiness. The support of family, friends, chaplains and health professionals can aid in this process. *We're there to help.*

2. DEPRESSION

Depression is common among older adults—about 20% of people over 65. It's *not* a normal part of the ageing process and should not be ignored. Depression is often linked with medical problems or life traumas. Good news: depression is a treatable health issue.

Questions to ask yourself:

In the past month, have I been—

- » Upset at having little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- » Troubled by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- » Had difficulty sleeping or poor appetite and weight loss?
- » Felt irritated by little things?

A "yes" means we're wise to talk to a GP. They assess our feelings and help us determine what help is beneficial.

Treatment—Many antidepressants exist and 65–80% of people will respond to the medication. Counselling is a useful part of treatment.

3. ANXIETY DISORDERS

They are common for older people: 11% of those over 55 are dealing with an anxiety disorder. This is more than occasional moments of nervousness, an increased pulse rate, sweaty palms, or a queasy stomach. A sign we have serious anxiety is when the symptoms persist, or are so severe they interrupt our normal activities.

Treatment includes verbal therapies, such as cognitive behaviour therapy; relaxation techniques or medication.

4. ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA

Over 350,000 Australians are living with dementia. Three in ten people over the age of 85, and almost one in ten people over 65, have dementia. The disease varies among each individual. In many cases, the younger the person is at the start of symptoms, the faster the disease progresses. For the carer, we see the *slow erosion* of the person we loved. Alzheimer's can be called "the long goodbye."

The person with Alzheimer's will experience stages as the disease progresses. *If our life is like a house, it's being slowly demolished.*

Early Stages—There is gradual memory loss (short-term memory is affected) and our behaviour and personality changes.

Middle Stages—The ability to perform routine tasks remains, while orientation to time, person and place, judgment and our abstract thinking will be affected.

Last Stages—This disease will eventually leave a person requiring total care in the last stages.

Treatment—When initially diagnosed, a person with Alzheimer's disease may respond best when cared for at home by family and with community support services, when possible. If severe dementia makes it too difficult or unsafe to care for an individual in their own home, then a residential program such as an assisted living facility or nursing home with a specialised unit designed to

care for people with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders is our best option.

GOING HOME

We never need to teach kids *how* to have fun. They love stuff like splashing in a big puddle of water. They see such *joy in life*.

As we age, if we believe our "going home" is death and then we rot, there is no joy to anticipate—only deep sadness. However, if we have the *confident hope* of eternity with **Jesus** and we have put our life in His care, then **everything changes for the best..**

In heaven, majestic angels sing: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—*

"Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love, than in your own weakness." Mother Teresa





the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come. You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power.” Revelation 4:8,11

Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. So we don't look at the troubles we see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that can't be seen. The things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we can't see will last forever. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

I heard a loud shout from the throne, “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” The one sitting on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Revelation 21:3-5

Acknowledgements—

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LETTER FROM A MOTHER TO A DAUGHTER

“My dear girl, the day you see I'm getting old, I ask you to please be patient, but most of all, try to understand what I'm going through. If when we talk, I repeat the same thing a thousand times, don't interrupt to say: “You said the same thing a minute ago.” Just listen, please. Try to remember the times when you were little and I would read the same story night after night until you would fall asleep.

When I don't want to take a bath, don't be mad and don't embarrass me. Remember when I had to run after you making excuses and trying to get you to take a shower when you were just a girl? When you see how ignorant I am when it comes to new technology, give me the time to learn and don't look at me that way. Remember, honey, I patiently taught you how to do many things like eating appropriately, getting dressed, combing your hair and dealing with life's issues every day. The day you see I'm getting old, I ask you to please be patient, and try to understand what I'm going through.

If I occasionally lose track of what we're talking about, give me the time to remember, and if I can't, don't be nervous, impatient or arrogant. Just know in your heart that the most important thing for me is to be with you. And when my old, tired legs don't let me move as quickly as before, give me your hand the same way that I offered mine to you when you first walked. When those days come, don't feel sad, just be with me, and understand me while I get to the end of my life with love. I'll cherish and thank you for the gift of time and joy we shared. With a big smile and the huge love I've always had for you, I just want to say, *I love you...my darling daughter.*”

My Personal Timeline

On the timeline below are spaces for seven key life events. Nominate the seven (7) key life events that have influenced your life to date and write one in each of the seven boxes below.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

What has been the **impact** of these **seven key life events** on **your journey** to date?

What can you do now and/or in the future to improve the journey ahead?