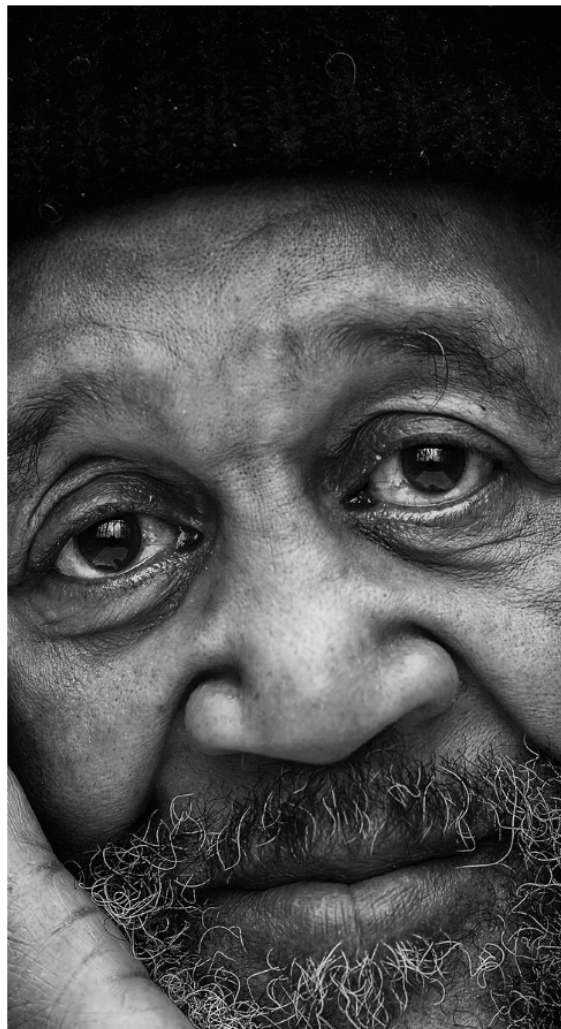
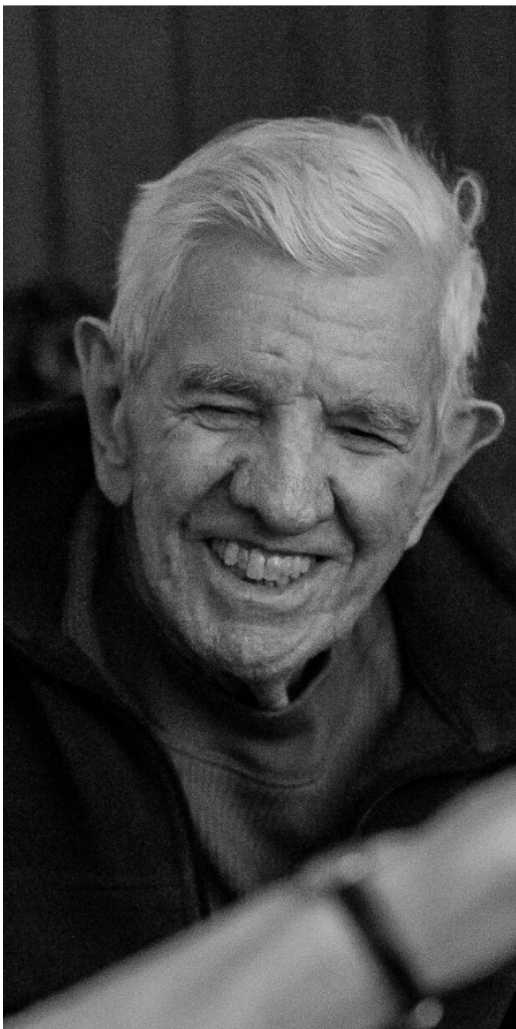


# HOPE FOR THE OLDER ADULT

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THE REV. BRAD HALES



## INTRODUCTION

Life has changed greatly during the COVID-19 crisis, but there is one specific group which has borne the brunt of this devastation, and that is older adults. From the onset, the aging were warned to stay in place, since they were more susceptible to the virus. While this mandate was prudent, for many seniors this was a hard pill to swallow — especially for those who are used to going out, doing things and socializing with friends.

The maturation process is a journey to begin with, so the threat of disease and forced quarantine can cause other issues to surface as there is much time to dwell on the negative. But even during this unprecedented time, the senior can have hope and encouragement in the Lord.

And that is what *Hope for the Older Adult* is all about. *Hope for the Older Adult* is a short Bible study on issues seniors are currently navigating and how God's Word can bring strength and comfort in the unknown. The effects of aging can be seen physically, mentally and spiritually. But they don't have to define who we are or how others see us. We cling to God's promises for the aging, and the Lord's guarantee that He will never "leave nor forsake us." Jesus is our enduring Savior. Whatever our age, He has promised us "life, life abundantly" in His name. So, let's begin with a promise.

In **Isaiah 46:3-4** it is written:

**"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."**

The Almighty is reminding His chosen people, the Israelites, to recognize Him alone above false gods. And that is His message to us today. He has created us, and we are His. Even as we age, He still has us and will never let us go. The Lord will always take care of His older disciples.

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# INDEPENDENCE/DEPENDENCE

**John 21:18:**

**“Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you don’t want to go.”**

The resurrected Jesus is speaking to Peter about “feeding the Lord’s sheep” and “following him.” But He also reminds him that there will be a great cost, death, as Peter will one day be handed over to the authorities. As much as this text is part of that discourse, it also speaks to mature adults and the issues surrounding the transition from independence to dependence.

One of the most difficult aspects of aging is losing independence: the loss of mobility, the loss of physical health, the loss of being able to care for yourself and live alone, the loss of loved ones, the loss of a driver’s license, the loss of being able to go out because of the virus. When independence is lost, and a person is forced to depend on a family member, friend, neighbor or care facility, it can cause a loss of pride, purpose and even demoralization.

While no one looks forward to this ever-present reality, the message needs to be that it’s ok to seek help from others. If someone is willing to provide care and safety, won’t that make our own aging experience better? And as much as we are open to others, may we ultimately be dependent upon the Lord.

As it is written in **Psalms 73:26:**

**“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *How have you been able to move from independence to dependence?*
- *What does it mean to be “dependent” upon the Lord?*

# GRIEF

Loss is a natural part of life. But it's not something we look forward to, nor enjoy. Whether the loss is large or small, it can affect us with sadness, mourning, tears, anger, disbelief, discouragement and grief. Loss for older adults can accelerate with the death of a spouse, friends or even pets. We may grieve over the fact that our bodies are changing, we can remember less, or we feel that control is slipping away. This feeling of helplessness may have really hit as we've been forced to stay in our homes and not fellowship with others due to the virus.

Grief is real and it stings — and that's what Naomi was experiencing in the Old Testament Book of Ruth. After her family was forced to leave their home in Bethlehem due to famine, they traveled to the land of Midian where she endured the deaths of her husband, sons, and potentially, the leaving of her daughters-in-law. This grief and disdain had a severe effect on her relationship with God as it is written in **Ruth 1:20-21:**

**“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”**

But even in the throes of her immense grief, the Lord never left Naomi. Starting with the commitment of her daughter-in-law Ruth, Naomi and Ruth traveled back to Bethlehem, where God saw to their needs. As Ruth married Boaz, their union would produce generations which would include King David and Jesus of Nazareth.

Reminding Naomi of God's continual presence and blessings, it says in **Ruth 4:14-15:**

**“Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.’”**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *How are you able to encounter God in times of grief?*

# ISOLATION

As we grow older, it would be so easy to isolate ourselves away from others due to health concerns, grieving over loss or not having the interest in connecting with fellow humans. And in our present world situation, we are being told to self- distance to mitigate the spread of the virus. Sometimes, isolation is needed for our own protection. But prolonged isolation is never good for our spirits and souls.

In **Proverbs 18:1** it is written:

**“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.”**

When it comes to aging, research always points to the fact that when older adults commit to socialize and build relationships they tend to age better. This is certainly the opposite of self-proposed isolation. Even if we are bound to house, apartment or trailer, can't we invite others to visit us (after the pandemic)? Can't we call on the phone? Can't we go online? Can't we FaceTime? Can't we write letters back and forth? Can't churches organize visitation teams?

Once isolated, it's sometimes hard to get back in the groove of wanting to be around others. But it's so essential for our body, mind and spirit. Hear the words from **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**:

**“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *How are you able to connect with friends and family during the pandemic, and in other times of isolation?*

# LONELINESS

Loneliness can be caused by several factors. Whether it be of a physical nature — including the loss of a loved one, families that live away, new living arrangements or even divorce — or of a spiritual nature where we feel distant or void from God, loneliness is difficult and life altering. Some studies even suggest that there is a correlation between loneliness and a wide array of other health concerns including depression, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, heart disease, poor decision making and decreased memory and learning. Loneliness has become such a profound issue that in years past the British government has appointed a cabinet level position entitled “Minister to Combat Loneliness” to deal with this worldwide health issue.

Obviously, physical connections can help. And when it comes to God, we have been provided tools to grow in our faith and grow closer to the Lord. It begins by crying out to the Lord as we read in **Psalms 25:16**:

**“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.”**

Through prayer, Bible reading and study, and home worship we can experience God's presence and love for which there is no separation. Please meditate upon the following Scriptures.

**Jeremiah 29:12-13:**

**“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with your heart.”**

**Hebrews 13:5:**

**“Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *How are you able to experience Jesus in your loneliness?*

## DECLINE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH

As we age, there are times when we may experience some physical decline in our health. Whether it comes early in life or does not appear until later, declines in our health are not easy to accept nor work through. These medical impediments may cause countless doctor visits, daily meds, surgeries, visiting nurses/rehab, constant pain and even mobility issues. So, how are we able to deal with these changes in physical circumstances?

**Attitude:** It is important to have a positive attitude. In **Proverbs 17:22** it is written:

**“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the Bones.”**

**Prayer:** We pray to God for help, healing and strength. As it is written in **Jeremiah 17:14**:

**“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.”**

**Resilience:** The ability to persevere even in the prevalence of decline. In **Psalms 31:24** it reads:

**“Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for the Lord.”**

**Relying on God's Grace:** The apostle Paul had some form of physical ailment (thorn in the flesh), and the Lord gave him the grace to deal with it as it says in **II Corinthians 12:8-9**:

**“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.’”**

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### FOR REFLECTION

- *What are some of your health concerns and how is God helping you with them?*

## ANXIETY

There is no question that being “locked in” could cause an increase of anxiety — if we allow it to. Being isolated, and maybe even alone, might drive us to become “down and discouraged.” We see this with the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament book of I Kings. After destroying Baal’s (false god) priests and hearing the threat of Queen Jezebel to take his life, Elijah hides out in a cave, anxious, concerned, and wondering why this would happen to him in his service to the Lord. But the Lord God came to Elijah in the wind, an earthquake and fire to restore Elijah’s hope, and to call him forward for ministry. When we’re anxious and in need we can always cry out to God for help as we read in **Psalm 34:17-18**:

**“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”**

Instead of letting anxiety and stress torment us even in these difficult days, we cling to God’s Word for encouragement and direction. **Proverbs 12:25** tells us:

**“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.”**

And it’s in this same Word that we’re told not to be anxious, but to pray. **Philippians 4:6-7** reads:

**“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”**

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### FOR REFLECTION

- *During this present crisis, what is causing you to be anxious? How is God helping you to deal with this stress?*



# FEAR

Fear is real and can have a profound effect on our aging experience. It's easy to fear when there are unknowns about the situation which we are presently enduring. It's easy to fear when we're being told that this virus is preying upon those middle-aged and older. And it's easy to fear when we can't have physical contact with our family members and friends.

Fear is something that could easily overwhelm us, especially in these days where we search for meaning and question the uncertainty. But this fear does not have to be the emotion which guides our daily living. The opposite of fear is love. That's why in **I John 4:18** we are reminded that, **"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."** There are over six hundred times in Scripture where either God, Jesus, or the Lord's messengers/servants are exhorting us "not to fear."

Please meditate upon the following texts that strengthen us in times of fear and weakness.

**Deuteronomy 31:6:**

**"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."**

**Isaiah 41:10:**

**"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."**

**II Timothy 1:7:**

**"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *What are your fears right now? How is God helping you to combat them?*

# WORRY

Even if we weren't going through a worldwide pandemic, some mature adults would still be worrying about something. Whether the worry is about children or grandchildren, running out of money or who is going to provide care in the event of declining health, the worry can become all encompassing. Sometimes, we just worry because we can't control the things around us. Consistent worry does not add to a lifespan but probably detracts from it. So, why do we consistently worry, even though there is little we can do to change course or direction?

Wouldn't it be great if we could learn to trust more and worry less? How is that possible? Always by clinging to Christ. In **John 14:1** Jesus reminds us;

**"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."**

In **Matthew 6:25-34**, Jesus Himself reminds us that worry gets us nowhere. We would be better off trusting in the One who promises to take care of His whole creation. Instead of worrying about the things of this temporal life, we are being called to always seek God first. Because when that is done, other blessings will come our way. Specifically, in verse 33 it says,

**"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *What things are you currently worrying about in your life? Are they things that you can control, or will they occur anyways?*
- *Have new worries arisen because of the virus? How is Jesus helping you to deal with these new worries? Where do you see the Lord's presence in your life?*

## FAITH SHARING

Faith is everything, isn't it?

Faith in Jesus is that wonderful gift from the Holy Spirit which brings us back into a right relationship with God. As it is written in **Ephesians 2:8**:

**"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God."**

So, since we've been provided this free gift of faith in Christ, what are we going to do with it as older adults? Share it with generations to come! If we won't share the inheritance, the riches, the wealth that we have in Jesus, how will our children, grandchildren and neighbor children ever come to know the Lord? Yes, maybe we've made the Savior known to our adult children, but their active practice of the faith is not happening right now. That doesn't mean that we can't reach out to our grandchildren or great-grandchildren, does it? In **II Timothy 1:5** we are reminded about the impact of grandparenting on faith as Paul writes about Timothy,

**"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well."**

Even in this pandemic, faith, the Word of God, could be shared through a phone call, text, written letter, or even a Skype or Zoom Bible study. As aging believers we have a clear responsibility to pass on the legacy of the Lord. In fact, it's really the most important thing we could ever do. As it is written in **Psalms 71:17-18**:

**"O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come."**

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### FOR REFLECTION

- *How are you intentionally sharing God with others?*

## SERVICE

Have you ever heard the expression, "I'm too old to serve?" Whether you believe it or not, it's not true! There is no such thing as "service retirement." Until we take our last breath, God can still use us to serve Him, as we serve others in His name.

Maybe you're wondering how you can serve during this time of pandemic. How about encouraging other seniors? How about praying for the country, the world and the Church? How about sending cards, especially for those in care facilities? How about assembling a protective mask? How about ordering carry out from a local small business? The opportunities are plentiful, even for the homebound.

One biblical example of an older man who was willing to serve is a guy named Barzillai. Barzillai was a mature man of means who wanted to help King David retain the leadership of Israel, as David's son, Absalom, was trying to steal the kingdom away from his father. While David was on the run, Barzillai was able to provide essential resources to David and his men. In **II Samuel 19:32** it says:

**"Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim for he was a very wealthy man."**

We must realize that age should never be an impediment to serving the Lord. No service is insignificant. It's about giving of ourselves, out of faith, to touch the life of another. In **John 13:14-15**, as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, we are reminded to follow the example of service as it is written,

**"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."**

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### FOR REFLECTION

- *How are you able to serve God during this crisis?*

# PRAYER

As we're sheltered in our homes, is there anything better we could do than pray?

Pray to God to stop the spread of the virus. Pray to God to heal those who have the virus. Pray to God for those who've been laid off from their jobs and are experiencing economic hardship. Pray to God for our governmental leaders — for wisdom, guidance and direction. Pray to God for the first responders, nurses, doctors and those who work in essential retail. Pray to God for the strength to stay inside so the curve will flatten. Pray to God thanking Him for His continual blessings in our lives. This is one great gift that the older adult can offer day after day. Just pray!

And the great thing about prayer is that it's free, always accessible, can be done anywhere, and there's a guarantee that the Lord is hearing our intercessions and answering them according to His will and way. In **I John 5:14** it is written;

**"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."**

When we pray, we can experience God's strength, God's presence, and God's support in our lives and the lives of others for whom we are praying. We can pray in all seasons, either speaking or listening. In **I Thessalonians 5:16-18** Paul reminds us to,

**"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."**

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## FOR REFLECTION

- *As we continue to work through this present crisis, what are you specifically praying for?*
- *How are you encountering and seeing the Lord work in these prayers?*

## THE HOPE CONTINUES

For the senior adult, this is not an easy period. Being told to self-confine, physically distancing from friends and family, and being unable to socialize with others can bring about frustration and anger to our lives. No, this is not an ideal situation.

But, being a person of faith and an example to both contemporaries and younger generations, you are vital to helping us move through this pandemic. That's why it is essential that the older adult clings to the hope that only comes in Jesus.

It's this hope which will continually provide us with meaning and purpose in our current reality and in the intended future to come. God alone is our hope, and we see this hope provided for the aging.

**Deuteronomy 34:1-8:** Near death, but still full of vigor, the 120-year-old Moses is shown the land promised both to his ancestors and to the generations to come. This is hope.

**Psalms 92:12-14:** Even in old age people will bear fruit for God. This is hope.

**Luke 2:22-35:** Before he died, Simeon was promised that he would see the Christ child. This is hope.

Do you see a biblical pattern? God continues to offer hope to the older adult. May we cling to this hope through the COVID-19 pandemic and offer it to others. As it is written in **Psalms 71:14:**

**"But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more."**

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### FOR REFLECTION

- *Where are you finding hope during this pandemic?*

# APPENDIX

**NALC Resources:** [missions.nalcnetwork.com/category/senior-ministry](https://missions.nalcnetwork.com/category/senior-ministry)

**2020 Mental Health Resources:** [mhanational.org/events/older-adults-isolation-during-covid-19](https://mhanational.org/events/older-adults-isolation-during-covid-19)

## Recommendations for Additional Reading:

- "Catching the Age Wave: A Handbook for Effective Ministry with Senior Adults" by Charles Arn
- "White Unto Harvest, Evangelizing Today's Senior Adults" by Charles Arn
- "Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century: Step-By-Step Strategies for Reaching People Over 50" by David Gallagher
- "Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century" by Richard Gentzler
- "A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors" by James Houston and Michael Parker
- "Aging as a Spiritual Journey" by Eugene Bianchi
- "One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church" by Gary McIntosh

## Books on Grandparenting Ministry:

- "Biblical Grandparenting: Exploring God's Design, Culture's Messages, and Disciple-Making Methods to Pass Faith to Future Generations" by Josh Mulvihill
- "Extreme Grandparenting" by Tim and Darcy Himmel
- "Passing On the Legacy: 7 Keys for Grandparents Making a Difference" by Catherine Jacobs
- "Please Pass the Faith: The Art of Spiritual Grandparenting" by Elise H.R. Rempel

### Senior Ministry Websites

- [seniorministry.org](https://seniorministry.org)
- [aloaserves.org](https://aloaserves.org)
- [retirementreformation.org](https://retirementreformation.org)

### Grandparenting Websites

- [christiangrandparenting.net](https://christiangrandparenting.net)
- [passthelegacy.wordpress.com](https://passthelegacy.wordpress.com)
- [legacycoalition.com](https://legacycoalition.com)

### Intergenerational Ministry Websites

- [faithwebbing.com](https://faithwebbing.com)
- [crossgenlife.org](https://crossgenlife.org)
- [genonministries.org](https://genonministries.org)

