

Creative prayer ideas

Praying for older people in the UK

These are some suggestions of activities to help us all pray for older people – for those known to us personally, those in our local community, and older people across the UK.

We have specifically designed this resource to be used in a number of ways – either as a personal or group meditation (to do jointly or individually with or without music playing in the background) or as prayer stations for a larger corporate setting such as a church service or special event. You can pick and choose as many or as few of the activities as you wish and they don't need to be done in any particular order. If you opt for using prayer stations, we suggest you either print this sheet out as a handout for each participant or print each section individually so that the instructions are displayed at each station.

1. Respect your elders:

Joel 2:28 says this is how the day of the Lord will be signalled: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

Older people clearly have a vital role in God's plans! And throughout the Bible, there are many examples of God using them to fulfil his purposes. Have a look through some of these verses and reflect on how God uses the wisdom, knowledge or experience of older men and women:

- God trusted Noah to build an ark and save humanity from the flood – read Genesis 6: 9 - 8:22.
- God brought Isaac to Abraham and Sarah despite their years, a child who signalled the beginning of Israel – read Genesis 17:1 - 18:15 and Genesis 21:1-7.
- God guided an aging Moses through the desert so he could lead thousands to the promised-land – read Deuteronomy 34.
- God gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a son in their old age, a son who would prepare the way for his own – read Luke 1:5-25.
- God used Simeon and Anna, both at the end of their lives, to declare to all Jerusalem that Jesus was the Messiah all Israel had been waiting for – read Luke 2:22-38.

Reflecting on these stories, how do you think our society compares in how we treat and value our elders?

If you feel comfortable, spend some time asking God to reveal to you any older people in your own life who are perhaps struggling with feeling undervalued or disrespected by others. Is there anything that you might be able to do to help, or to particularly show them more value and respect to compensate?

2. Care in crisis:

Have a look at information from Age UK on the current situation with the UK's care system – e.g. the following webpages on their website are helpful:

- <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/poor-quality-care-services-big-q/>
- <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/poor-quality-care-services-big-q/care-in-crisis-key-issues/>

As you read this information, what particularly strikes you? What makes you sad, angry, surprised?

Using the prayer points below, pray for:

- wisdom and compassion for the Government in making reforms to the care system
- creative, sustainable ways to provide extra funds for the care system so that everyone can get the care they need
- insight and energy for organisations, such as Age UK, who are lobbying the Government on care reform, and for public support for their campaigns
- reassurance and peace for those worried about the system changing and what it might mean for their future care needs
- comfort, love and help for those being let down by the current system.

Think about anyone you know who is currently in care, whether in a nursing home or getting support at home. Pray for their situation, as well as for all the carers and nursing homes in your local area.

3. Staying warm:

Over 50% of the households who struggle with fuel poverty – defined as when heating the home costs more than 10% of annual income – are those of older people. And in the winter of 2012-2013, 300,000 more households entered fuel poverty compared to previous years because of sharp increases in energy prices. It's predicted that if energy prices continue to rise, over 9 million homes in the UK will be in fuel poverty by 2016.

Every winter, over 200 old people die per day from preventable causes – that's 24,000 extra deaths each year resulting from the colder weather.

Move to sit beside a heater or radiator. As you reflect on the warmth coming from it, pray for those who struggle with the cold each winter. Pray for practical and political help for all suffering from fuel poverty and for those most at risk in the cold. Ask God to open your eyes to neighbours or other people in your community who are perhaps struggling to heat their homes, and whether there's anything you can do to help.

Maybe when you're next at a computer, you could also get involved with Age UK's Spread the Warmth campaign and/or email your MP to call on the government to act – <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/> and <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/keeping-your-body-healthy/preventing-winter-deaths/>

4. We are family:

Many older people suffer from acute loneliness. They are isolated from others for many reasons, including:

- an inability to get out and about due to ill-health, frailty, fear of falling, bad weather or lack of transport
- poverty
- a lack of friends and/or family close by, especially when spouses and peers start passing away
- worry about being a burden to others
- loss of daily structure, purpose and/or networks following retirement.

Pick up a pebble or another small item in your hand and hold it tightly. Feel the closeness of it on your skin and look at how your fingers wrap around it. Reflect on what this experience tells you about the intimacy of God, who has promised to be with you always.

Read Psalm 139:1-5. Then take each verse individually and pray the truth of it over every lonely old person in your local community.

Now read Psalm 68:5-6a. Use it to help you pray that those who are alone feel the comfort and strength of God's presence, and that we, his church, may be family to those who have none.

5. No more fear:

Look at what Zechariah 8:3-5 says...

"This is what the Lord says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain." This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

What a wonderful picture of all the generations living together in harmony.

However, many older people are frightened of the younger generations and media focus on teen gangs and "hoodies" has made the situation a lot worse (for both young and old). Whether an old person's fear is rooted in genuine danger or not, the effect is the same... debilitating fear preventing them from living fully.

Take a few moments to close your eyes and picture your neighbourhood, perhaps your street, town square or city centre, with both young and old present. Now apply the Zechariah passage to your image, picturing young and old chatting and playing together; a teenager helping an old lady across the street; an old man giving wise counsel to a young boy; laughter filling the air...

These are not naïve pictures – these are God's Kingdom becoming a reality. Pray that you can play your part in helping it happen and ask God to bring to mind any specific things that you should pray for or do to be part of this transformation.

6. Mind games:

The Mental Health Foundation tells us that:

- Depression affects 1 in 5 older people living in the community and 2 in 5 living in care homes.
- Over two million people over 65 suffer with depression and the major contributors are:
 - being widowed or divorced
 - being retired/unemployed
 - physical disability or illness
 - loneliness and isolation.
- Dementia affects 5% of people over the age of 65 and 20% of those over 80.
- About 700,000 people in the UK have dementia (1.2% of the population) at any one time.

Pray for God's light and love to shine into the minds of all who are depressed, anxious or suffering from dementia. As you do so, listen to Liz Baddaley's song "Safe hiding place" which was written as a prayer for all suffering from anxiety and depression (you can find the mp3 of the song on our songs page at the end of specific issues page: <http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-songs.html> – and if you don't have facilities for playing the song, you can read the lyrics from the chord sheet instead). Pray that the God of refuge would redeem unsafe hiding places, bringing peace and joy as his perfect love casts away all fear.

7. A good ending – part 1:

Suffering from ill-health and increasingly frail bodies, many old people are forced to face the reality that death is getting closer.

As you read through the following scriptures, pray for everyone in this situation to know the comfort and love of God who has promised to be with us always. In particular bring to mind anyone that you know personally who is in this situation:

- Psalm 23:4
- Jonah 2:2
- John 3:16
- John 14:1-4
- Revelation 21:3-4.

If you do know anyone personally in this situation, or even know of older people who are in good health now but might be frightened about what the future holds, ask God whether there's anything he'd like you to do to help them.

8. A good ending – part 2:

In scripture and from what we see of the church today, we know that God's Kingdom is made up of a mixed bag of disciples, all moving towards knowing him more deeply and fully. Paul reflects this in Philippians 3:13-14, and encourages us – whatever our situation or background – to focus on the “upward call” of becoming more and more Christ-like:

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the **upward call** of God in Christ Jesus.” (*New King James Version*)

This “upward call” is the purpose of all our lives, no matter how young or old. However, many older people have lost a sense of purpose – perhaps through a lack of respect for their opinions, skills or experience by younger generations; or feeling no longer relevant or any use; or sometimes because of redundancy or retirement and an uncertainty about what to do to fill the time.

Spend some time reflecting on what you think pursuing the “upward call” looks like for your own life. Now use this insight to think about what it might look like for an older person (whether they have had a faith for many years, have only just come to faith, or don't yet know God) – does it look much different? If it helps, reflect on Galatians 5:22-23:

“But **what happens when we live God's way**? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.” (*The Message*)

Pray for any older person (either known to you personally or generally) who is struggling to know their purpose in life. As you do so, light a candle, asking God to shine his light of purpose and identity into their lives, and for him to help them by bringing inspiration and opportunities for how to spend their time. Pray too, that we, the church, would not only spur one another on to live God's way, but that we would also take the time to learn from those who have been journeying in response to the “upward call” for many years.