



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Caring as Honoring
(*Aging*, pp. 9-17)

Suggested Article:

📖 Come, Let Us Worship
(*Aging*, pp. 79-82)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:
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Christian Reflection

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Caring as Honoring

Congregations are “soul communities” where young and old are soul-mates bound together as an extended family of God. How can congregations assure that senior adults are cared for and honored as resourceful contributors to community life, wisdom-givers, exemplars of the faith, and worthy recipients of care?

Prayer

Scripture Readings: Matthew 15:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4

Responsive Reading†

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

**Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.**

Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps!

**Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!**

**Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!**

**Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!**

**Young men and women alike,
old and young together!**

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

Praise the LORD!

Reflection

The commandment to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16) goes beyond obeying and respecting them when we are children (Ephesians 6:1). Jesus consistently applied it to adults caring for their elders (Matthew 15:1-9; compare his statement to the rich young man in 19:19). Scripture instructs the church to extend respect and care to widows and to all elders (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 5:1-8). Of course, we care for the oldest among us not only from our commitment to upholding these biblical injunctions to honor them, but also because we were created for community with one another and with God. “Indeed, the grounds for honor-bestowing caring are found in the richness of the metaphor ‘image of God,’” writes Anne Streaty Wimberly. “When we see clearly this image in our elders, we likewise understand caring as honoring to be a journey of God’s people, the young and old together. The journey of the young with the elders is in preparation for their own continuing journey. It is the whole community’s learning from and responding to senior adults as persons of worth.” How can we make honor-bestowing care for our elders concrete in our lives?

- ▶ *Remembering* how the lives of specific older adults intertwine with our lives, even when we struggle with these memories,



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can lead us to honor them and other senior adults. As a student concluded to Wimberly, “We *must* care for and honor them because of the life God gave them and has given us through them, the wisdom shared by them, the needs they have for care, and the opportunity we still have to learn from their lives.” This remembering occurs only when we resist the youth orientation that separates the generations.

- ▶ Congregations fulfill their calling to be *soul communities* when they love and sustain their members as an extended family of God. They validate their older members as resourceful contributors in its ongoing life, as exemplars of the faith, and as repositories of wisdom. After senior adults can no longer actively participate in their gatherings, congregations validate their role as worthy recipients of care.
- ▶ Being present with older adults in conversation and listening is easily neglected in “our fast-paced, technological, productivity- and material-driven world.” We need to emphasize *relational time*, intentionally structured for “listening to and sharing the stories of life’s journey, engaging in moral discourse where it is called for, and participating with them and family members in discerning answers to difficult life and death questions,” Wimberly writes. “A relational orientation to time also understands that churches must become network builders, connecting senior adults with resources churches cannot provide, but are available in the wider community.”

Study Questions

1. How can you provide more “relational time” with older adults in your family and in your congregation? How can you cultivate more opportunities for remembering their contributions to your life?
2. Wimberly urges us to provide honor-bestowing care for the well-being of senior adults in seven aspects: spiritual, social, mental, physical, work and economic, recreational, and environmental (*Aging*, pp. 14-15). How does your congregation honor its older members in each of these ways?
3. John Westerhoff describes older adult, adult, and younger people as the generations of memory, the present, and vision (*Aging*, p. 81). How are these generations *linked* or *separated* in worship, study, and service in your congregation?
4. “‘Honor your father and mother’ is a social injunction designed for mature children and their even more mature parents,” David Buttrick notes. “Moreover, the commandment addresses corporate Israel. We Americans tend to read our Bibles as if every ‘you’ were second-person singular. But the Fifth Commandment is addressed to Israel and is intended to define social policy. In other words, the commandment has more to do with social security issues than with psychological attitudes within the family” (quoted in *Aging*, p. 72). What are the implications of this observation for our society?

Departing Hymn: “Then Dawns the Light”

†Adapted from Psalm 148 (NRSV).

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Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching goals

1. To understand how the commandment to honor our parents is applied to adult children.
2. To reflect on how we should provide honor-bestowing care for the elderly in our congregations and in our society.
3. To appreciate the need to integrate older members in the worship, study, and service of the congregation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Aging (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Read the story Wimberly tells about the eighty-year-old woman who recommitted her life to faithful service in her church. It begins: "A pastor told me about an eighty-year-old woman of his church who, when the invitation to Christian discipleship was given one Sunday, walked to the altar and said: 'I want to give my life to Christ'" (*Aging*, p. 13).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Lead members to thank God for the gifts of guidance and encouragement they have received from specific older adults in their lives.

Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Matthew 15:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

The basis for honor-bestowing care to older adults includes, in addition to the commandment to honor our parents, two other biblical themes. First, the church is instructed to extend respect and care to widows and to all elders. If time permits, the group might want to discuss Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 5:1-8. Second, the image of God in all human beings includes their calling to be related properly to God and one another. When we recognize the image of God in older adults, we see how they are called to be related with younger people in "a journey of God's people, the young and old together. The journey of the young with the elders is in preparation for their own continuing journey."

Even after we know with our theological heads that we should honor older adults, how do we become committed in our hearts to their care? This study surveys three of Wimberly's recommendations. Enrich your discussion, as time permits, with her rich presentation in the *Aging* issue: (1) that we inten-

tionally *remember* older members' contributions to our lives (see *Aging*, pp. 11-12); (2) that we *validate their continuing roles* within our congregations (pp. 12-14); and (3) that we increase our *relational time* with them, despite the temptations in our culture to isolate the generations (pp. 15-16). [Wimberly's fourth recommendation, that we address older adults' well-being in seven aspects, can be discussed in study question two.]

Study Questions

1. Members might discuss how the congregation provides *relational time* (a) by receiving older adults in group meetings and sharing responsibility with them; (b) by providing opportunities for them to share their rich stories; and (c) by networking with other community resources in order to meet senior adults' needs. Wimberly describes how she encourages students to remember older adults' contributions (p. 11). Beth Jackson-Jordan recommends creative ways for congregations to listen to their stories (pp. 46-47). Ask members how they can do similar things within their families.
2. In the interest of time, members may want to focus on only two or three of the aspects that are most significant to them. Or, you might ask individuals or smaller groups to think about each of the aspects, and then report their conclusions to the whole group.
3. Members might respond to Terry York's ideas for intergenerational worship in "Come, Let Us Worship" (*Aging*, pp. 79-82). York suggests that linking generations in worship is best accomplished when they are linked throughout the other activities of the congregation. Are there opportunities for intergenerational Bible study and prayer? Do mission trips, church recreation opportunities, and outreach ministries involve several generations? Are all three generations represented on major committees and planning groups?

Who are the Christian models for younger people in the congregation? What will be missed if young people do not worship and minister regularly with older members? Ask for members' response to Katie Wiebe's comment: "Association with the older generation gives the younger generation practice in the art of living and dying. Life should not be a disjointed affair with each generation living isolated from the next, like sausage links. Life is a flowing stream.... My conclusion is that growing older Christian is not much different than growing up Christian. It's a matter of models and support. Mother and Dad were my models growing up. Older adults are my models now. I can be a model to younger men and women" (quoted in *Aging*, p. 72).

4. Christians can help provide for the needs of older adults in the larger society by offering a biblical rationale for honoring the elderly, and, through the church, a model of how a community can care for their needs. We can volunteer in community organizations that provide direct care, such as meals to shut-in people, hospice care, and so on. We can help older people know about and use the government agencies that provide social security. We should show concern for all older people in society, by advocating for adequate social security and health care.

Departing Hymn

"Then Dawns the Light" is on pp. 55-57 of *Aging*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.