

***“When I visit my Mom, it is always the same old thing. We sit and watch television. We hardly speak! The strange thing is that she tells everyone after I’ve visited, what a good time she had and how glad she is that I come so often. She must be bored! I know I am! Why does she tell people we have such good visits?”***

***“Because your Mom probably enjoys just knowing you are there. She is comforted and feeling less alone and isolated when you are there. She probably knows she can talk if she feels like it, but is content not to have to do so.”***

What differing visions of the same event.

We talked about the difference for quite some time, agreeing that what we might find boring and unfulfilling is not necessarily what someone else (in this case an older adult) might experience the same way. If we begin our visits to older adults with a willingness to allow them to set the agenda, there is a sense of acceptance and control that so many older adults do not experience. In this instance many a television program or movie opens possibilities for deeper sharing and conversation. “What do you make out of the lead actor’s attitude?” “I can identify with him, can you?” Even while watching, a comment might spark some deeper thought. “Wow, I think she hit the nail on the head, what about you?”

The point being if we are visiting to be excited and entertained, we risk not being present for the one we are visiting. Go where the older adult seems to be. Enter her world, enter his world! When we do we affirm that person and the possibility of real sharing is greatly enhanced. Every visit does not have to be ripe with meaning and purpose.

The overwhelming issue for many older adults is loneliness and a sense of abandonment. Simply “being there” is often the best thing we can offer.

I remember one of the first funeral services I ever conducted. I was inexperienced, frightened, and insecure and to my way of thinking, blew the service entirely. To this day I remember the letter I received a few days later from the deceased’s family member, who must have sensed my discomfort. She said, “It doesn’t matter what you said or did not say. What mattered is that you were there and you obviously cared. We are so grateful.”

That note was redemptive! It was also instructive! There is no substitute for a ministry of presence. Nor is there only one way to be present.

Worry less about what to say or do when visiting! Be more concerned with being present! You will not go wrong.

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