

Leaning on God For All Our Live Long Days

By Jim Stinson, Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

My mom had a spirit that never gave up. She was game for anything that came her way. If there were a laugh to be found, she would find it. If one day brought unexpected trouble she would say, "Oh well, tomorrow is another day." She worried little if at all. She was a joy to be with, as evidenced by the number of friends she had.

My dad, on the other hand, was not as easy going. He worried a lot, did not laugh as often as she did. People liked and respected him, but he did not have close friends. Partly because he always worked two jobs, and partly because he did not make friends easily. One of my lasting memories of him is a statement he made many times, especially as he grew older. "I don't know if I've lived too long or if I haven't lived long enough." As the world changed, he wasn't sure the changes were good and he feared where they might lead. My mother, however, thought there was possibility in every change.

In ways I am still coming to realize, their approach to life and its changes has influenced and is influencing my life. Their approach left me with a clear choice. Embrace life as it comes and expect the best or fret about it and worry about where it will lead.

My mother never said, "Maybe I've lived too long." Life, even when its events led her to live in a nursing home, found her ready for more. Even when afflicted with dementia and early Alzheimer's disease, she seemingly enjoyed her days, so deeply ingrained was the attitude of welcoming each new day. My father, on the other hand, died young. We never knew how he would deal with aging. My guess is that it would have been with the attitude, "Maybe I've lived too long."

As Christians, we have a teacher who never shied away from the reality of life. We have a teacher who always chose life as it came, not always placidly with an attitude of fatalism and resignation, but rather with the certainty that God would accompany him at all times. He never wondered if he had lived too long, always assuming God had a purpose for his life no matter where it led. As those who engage in ministry with and to older adults, we are called to faithfully remind them that Jesus had it right, God always accompanies them regardless their situation. We have to continually challenge them to see the possibilities if they hear God, in Jesus, speaking the words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." We have to challenge them to faithfully see each new day as God's choice for them. We are called to help them see they have not lived long enough.

A tough assignment? Yes, it is. But a faithful witness? Yes, it is!