

## VISION

"I just do what I have to do and then live the best I can." Maybe these words don't strike you as being anything out of the ordinary. They are because they come from my friend. He is in his mid eighties, has multiple medical issues, has trouble walking and trouble seeing. He has been in and out of the emergency room numerous times with severe nosebleeds, and most importantly is on a dialysis machine for several hours three times a week.

And then there is another friend! No where as limited as he is, with only the normal physical concerns of many older adults (such as high blood pressure and a restricted diet), she never has a pain or an ailment that isn't "the worst you could imagine." Like him, she is in her mid eighties. But unlike him, the words I hear very often are not about living the best she can. Rather they are, "Why me? I keep asking myself why me?"

The question I ask myself, and in other gentler words have asked her, is "Why are you always seeing the worst, rather than living the best you can?" Why do some older adults seem to deal with life constructively, while others do so destructively?

There are many reasons, as different as the individuals involved. But one of the things I see constantly is the huge role a healthy spirituality, a personal appreciation of life as a gift from a loving creator plays in shaping one's attitude. One friend is certain that God is good and loving, and says so nearly every day; the other is certain that God is testing her, and complains about that every day. Clergy and lay people, ministering to and with older adults, help shape a person's faith, a person's spirituality.

I have heard well meaning folk feed negative understandings of faith and spirituality.

"God has a plan for this illness, this disability."

"God is testing us. Just be faithful and keep the faith."

Such comments, rather than helping the person deal with the issues at hand, subtly lead her/him to question the goodness and love of a God who would use sickness and pain to accomplish a divine purpose.

Better to encourage the person to see God as the one who provides strength and direction for whatever life brings us! Better to help shape a faith that experiences God as ever present and ever willing and ready to support us on our journey. It is difficult to do so if we come to see God as the source of our difficult moments.

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