



Aging with Grace

by Christine Eggers, owner of ATH

Years ago, I went to my pastor after an argument with a family member. I expected commiseration and advice to pray for my family member's poor condemned soul. Instead, he told me to apologize and ask for forgiveness. What? I may not have handled things as well as I could have but I had suffered much more. Hadn't I? Every way I looked at it, I had more points in the right than in the wrong. I deserved the apology.

Aging gracefully is the subject of thousands of tip sheets, bullet points, and advice columns. Mainly directed at women, they are usually advice on how to look pretty even though we're old. Fair enough.

Aging with grace is different. In the simplest terms, it's learning to apologize and receive forgiveness. An apology begins with the desire to improve our relationship. It includes remorse for the harm done and a promise to not do it again. Forgiveness wipes the slate clean. It is the new beginning. It is grace. We all have difficult relationships. To age with grace, we humble ourselves. We reach out to troubled relations, apologize for the specific harm we've caused, and ask forgiveness. Yes, even if what they did was worse. After about three years of tension, I did follow my pastor's guidance.

But, what about the harms and offenses we've endured at the hands of others? Don't we deserve an apology? Shouldn't we be asked for forgiveness?



Yes, we do and should. But it's much easier to let go of petty offenses and great harms we've endured when we acknowledge the harm we've caused. This is called removing the log from our own eye before pointing to the speck in our neighbor's eye.

Grace builds stronger, more enduring relationships. Just like small fissures that have been mended build strong bones. Grace is not, "taking the high road," and feeling morally superior. It's not pretending something didn't happen and not talking about it. It's certainly not being a doormat, letting bad behavior slide, or always giving in. These tactics don't mend relationships. They allow the fissures to become cracks, or even fractures that break up relationships. One feels guilty and the other resentful. Here then, the typical way to avoid the grief is to avoid the person until years go by without contact and we are angry at a virtual stranger, having missed all the ups and downs, joys, and sorrows we could have shared.

Loneliness is more prevalent than ever before. We live more isolated lives than ever before. We live alone more than ever before. Our hearts ache for lack of a friendly voice or a warm hug. Even with a vibrant social life, there may be a specific person missing, a parent, child, sibling, or dear friend lost to us now. How much loneliness is our own doing?

Living with grace is the lost relationship restored unblemished and new. It is the joy of the prodigal being received into his father's loving arms after wishing his father dead and running away. It is natural to want to be the father, (he is God after all). But the human father could only wait for his son to return. The son, in the temporal world, had the power to return home the whole time. He simply needed to humble himself enough to apologize. And there was great rejoicing.

Christine Eggers RN is the owner of Appeal to Heaven LLC: Independent Nurses' Network. The characters depicted are composites of people she has met, known, and cared for over 30 years in the nursing profession.

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