

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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Prayers for the Later Years A Compendium

The Rev. Canon Malcolm Boyd

I confess, Jesus, that I love some friends more than I like them. I like some friends more than I love them. Yet I am grateful for all of them.

I am continually astonished by their diversity. Some friendships are comforting and nurturing, while others challenge me and force me to struggle. Some friendships offer me security and meet my needs, while others require me to make sacrifices and receive little or nothing in return.

What all of them have in common, Jesus, is a sharing of life in the present moment. They safeguard me from rigid pride and crippling aloneness. Friendships are among my greatest blessings.

When I was blessed with a free will in my creation, Jesus, I was entrusted with the treasure of forgiveness. It seems to me it amazingly resembles a muscle in my own body: I may choose to exercise it or not.

Whenever I freely offer forgiveness to someone, I am saved from bitterness, pride, and anger. However, when I do not offer forgiveness, I find myself withdrawing into an illusion of perfectionism. (I am perfect! I also expect it from others!)

Whenever I refuse to accept forgiveness from someone else, I commit myself to the tragedy of useless civil war without end.

Thank you, Jesus, for using forgiveness to remind me that I share humanness with other people, and also with you in your incarnation.

Before his elderly mother died, Herbert gave up literally everything to care for her. As soon as he got home from work he was by her side, trying to meet her every need, listening to what she had to say.

However, he grew angry when she appeared not to be grateful. Always she seemed to want more, more, more. Herbert let his mother know that he was frustrated and felt she was ungrateful. Then she died. Now he cannot forgive himself.

Herbert does not seem to understand that forgiveness is essential, Jesus, and self-forgiveness is a large part of it. None of us can allow our yesterdays to dominate our todays and tomorrows, can we, Jesus?

Is it possible to forgive? Sheila asked the question after her divorce. She felt hurt and bitter.

Time passed. Sheila's feelings slowly mellowed. She remembered the good times as well as the bad ones.

Then she learned her former mate was seriously ill, required difficult surgery, and would be confined to his home during recuperation. He had no one to care for him.

When Sheila contemplated forgiveness, it occurred to her the commandment to forgive mentions no exceptions, Jesus. She gave up part of her vacation time to watch over him, deciding that she wished to invest time and energy in being friends.

It seems Sheila found an answer to a hard question, Jesus.

Different people's reactions to my age can be upsetting, Jesus. Thanks to your example and teachings, I take myself seriously in the scheme of things. I am grateful that my life matters and I am significant in your love.

It helps to know that I have gifts to offer. One is my awareness that life in the fast lane can be a killer, while a more reflective pace permits greater sensitivity, understanding, and loving.

I wish more people could understand this, Jesus.

Thanks for rescuing me, Jesus. Aches and pains caught up with me. I was fatigued, without a spring to my step or an ability to laugh at anything. I felt I'd become a bore to other people, talking endlessly about my pains and problems.

Just then you stirred me out of my lethargy when you guided a good friend to remind me that I may be old in years but needn't be in attitude.

Soon I stopped whining and said "Yes" to an offer of volunteer work. The fresh project energized me, brought me into a community with other people, and I was on my way.

Your own example of selflessness, hard work, and love of people continues to inspire me with hope, Jesus.

Gloria is struggling to deal with immobilizing arthritis, Jesus. She's tried different medications, experienced up and down days, and sought a new center of interest in her life.

Her prayers were answered when she discovered a training program that enables her to work with a computer. Now she leaves her home with a walker at six-thirty most mornings. Then she catches a bus that carries her to a nearby class on time at a community college.

At first, she was afraid of the new routine and felt insecure about her health. But she persevered. She is aware how blessed she's been by entering into this whole new phase of her life.

Gloria hangs out happily with her younger classmates. Friendly and supportive, they represent an entirely new form of community in her experience.

Courageously, she continues to enable her fulfillment and joy, Jesus.

Rosemary taught school for thirty-two years, welcoming the busyness, learning, human contacts, and the joy of helping children. She also luxuriated in the security of her husband and home.

But now, with all that gone, she feels stripped to the bone, Jesus. Her husband died a short while ago after both of them retired.

At seventy-two, she has children and grandchildren whom she loves. But she feels that she has lost life's meaning.

Yet our life continues. The sun comes up, trees stand, dogs bark, the evening news appears on TV. There are plants to water, bills to pay, people and challenges to meet, and prayers to pray. Please guide her to find meaning, Jesus.

I had a difficult time this morning getting out of bed, Jesus. I didn't want to. I had rolled over into a very comfortable position. I wanted nothing at that moment to do with the day's demands.

Needless to say, I got out of bed. I caught sight of my face in the mirror over the basin. Clearly, I wasn't prepared to like myself very much this morning.

However, I found myself surprised when I greeted me with equanimity. I mustered a warm smile. The smile looked good. I liked me even better.

The day was going to be fine, after all. I accepted me, and it, and you, Jesus.

Stay with me, Jesus. Let me have your firm hand, the quietness of your presence, the thundering echo of your love.



The Rev. Canon Malcolm Boyd is poet/writer-in-residence at Los Angeles' Episcopal Cathedral Center of St. Paul. Augsburg has just published his 27th book, *Prayers for the Later Years*. Boyd, whose 80th birthday is next June, is best known as the author of *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* He acts as spiritual director for a number of clergy and laity. Next spring Morehouse will publish *Race and prayer: Collected Voices, Many Dreams* that he co-edits with Bishop Chester L. Talton.

He likes hiking in the hills and along the beach, Iris Murdoch novels, videos of old movies like *Grand Hotel* and *Dinner at Eight*, watering his fuschia or discovering a fresh hibiscus blossom in the garden, reading biography, a BLT sandwich with avocado, shad roe, Vivaldi, Dinah Washington, golden labs, people one-at-a-time instead of in a group, the season of Advent, and the sound of rain on the roof.



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