

Prayers of the Elders

During the COVID-19 pandemic, government health officials have repeatedly said that senior citizens are among the highest-risk groups for infection and death. And while that may be true in the natural, our nation's elderly are perhaps the most powerful intercessors and prayer warriors out there when it comes to turning the tide spiritually. That's what Cicily Smith—an author and Community Relations Manager at Dominion Senior Living in Frankfort, Kentucky, a faith-based senior living community—told *Charisma* during a recent interview.

“I think that in today's society, people have had a tendency to push the seniors or the elderly off to the side like they're used up and can no longer contribute to society,” Smith says. “But in all actuality, they're like hidden treasures with a gold mine of wisdom, and there's a wealth of power in their office [as] matriarchs and patriarchs.”

She says caring for seniors is a crucial part of following Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

“If you take the time to really study God's Word, you'll see His heart that He has for the seniors,” Smith says. “I believe it's important to get the word out that we need to continue to honor, treasure and value them. We need to give back to them what they've done for us—the current generation as well as the generations to come—by taking care of them to the best of our ability. God says that He'll honor [the faithful] with long life, and God can work through us ... to minister to the needs of our elders and to give so they can reap the harvest on what they sowed in years past.

“Whether they were doctors, lawyers, teachers or stay-at-home moms, they've blazed a trail for us, and we need to honor that. I believe that that has been lost, and it's something that needs to be awakened—because once that is, those prayers

will have and are having an effect on our country and our family.”

Love Your Neighbors

Smith says her passion for caring for senior citizens and the elderly blossomed out of her relationship with her grandmothers.

“I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with my grandmothers,” Smith says. “I didn’t really know my grandfathers because they both had passed away. But I just spent time with my grandmothers. [I would] go help them go to the grocery store and help them with their houses.”

She says she felt God truly calling her to the field about 10 years ago, when she had the opportunity to help the vascular dementia-afflicted mother of her associate pastor.

“I did private in-home caregiving with her about 10 years ago,” she says. “I went into the situation totally clueless, but I trusted God that He would help me with regard to how to provide care for her. It was like on-the-job training, you know. I believe the Holy Spirit helped me to minister to the needs of my associate pastor’s mother, who was a sweet, very well-known, strong Christian woman. I had opportunity to be with her one-on-one for about two years.”

She says that season showed her that serving and honoring the elderly can be a God-honoring form of ministry—to be the hands and feet for the people who need it most.

“Vascular dementia had tried to limit her in her cognitive abilities and things,” Smith remembers. “Sometimes that can kind of cause some confusion. So I was able to help her try to maintain that sense of normalcy in regard to what she did in her social life or with things she did in the community. We tried to keep those things going to the best of her ability. That’s where I first got introduced to senior care, and that’s

where the gift was discovered and started developing.”

Smith has grown only more passionate over time about elder care, a topic she has written three books about. Her books include *Elders on the Move*, a testimony-based devotional; *Understanding the Mission*, a how-to handbook on faith-based caregiving; and *. to Remember*, a short booklet that explains how to address behaviors in seniors with Alzheimer’s and dementia. Smith says she is passionate about showing God’s heart for seniors.

“I quote Isaiah 46:4 in one of my first books, and it says, ‘I will be your God throughout your lifetime until your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you and I will carry you along and save You,’” Smith says. “... It’s a ministry to be able to help them, especially in the sense that they may not be as strong or mobile as they once were. But it’s our job to help mobilize them, to help them to continue to do things that they used to love doing, or at least to talk to them about those things and get them to try to talk back to us about things they’ve experienced or enjoy doing. God says we’re to love our neighbors, and that’s part of being a doer of God’s Word—elderly or not, we want to walk in love toward them.”

Prayers With Power

Smith believes many Christians are neglecting the spiritual wisdom and power possessed by these senior Christians. She believes these intercessors are an often-untapped resource within the body of Christ.

“A lot of the elderly Christian men and women have an awesome office where they’re able to be intercessors and pray for their families and for our country—and their prayers are having an effect,” Smith says. “Just because they may not be able to do things physically as well as they used to or may have some kind of dementia or cognitive disability, that

doesn't mean that they can't still be an asset to society with their prayers, intercession and the wisdom they have to teach generations to come. They blazed the trail, and they've laid that foundation for us. I think in America, we haven't quite fully recognized that power and that treasure that they are. They're very valuable. I think that's God's heart for that generation."

In the midst of a pandemic—one that can threaten the health and lives of these intercessors—these prayer warriors are more important than ever. In fact, Smith says she reminds residents at Dominion Senior Living of their calling and God-given purpose every day.

"I have opportunity to do devotions with them pretty much on a weekly basis," Smith says. "And during that time, we read Psalm 91. On purpose, we are not just reading this psalm for ourselves, but reading it for our city, for our country and for one another, because that's a psalm of protection. We openly have talked about and discussed some of the things that are going on. I've made sure to emphasize that the elders in our community have been called to be intercessors. And so during this time of what's going on, their prayers are very much needed."

Smith says that if there's anything our seniors can do, it's pray.

"You know, the Bible says the fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much, and God highly esteems the prayers of the elders," Smith says. "... God's not going to neglect those prayers. He moves on those. I explain to them that as our prayers go up, the blessings come down, and the angels are acting on our behalf, no matter how we feel. Sometimes, I tell them, it may feel like your prayers are not having an effect, but they really are. And that's really where our faith kicks in, trusting what God said to us: that He'll never leave us nor forsake us, and He always causes us to triumph."

Smith says she sees copies of Psalm 91 laminated and hanging up in several residents' rooms, and she believes reminding them of their calling helps to renew their purpose and anointing during difficult seasons.

"It gives them a sense of purpose—not only during this time of COVID, because we've been doing this long before COVID started," Smith says. "... It's important for our seniors to be able to pray and know their value in that intercession in this time, because it gives them a sense of purpose, and it helps them to know they are still needed. It keeps them from slipping into depression and any kind of fear, anxiety or loneliness. They know they're doing something that's making a difference, that's contributing to something such as COVID. ... Their prayers can go outside of the four walls that they're in and have an effect on thousands—masses of people." {eo}

Taylor Berglund *is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and the host of several podcasts on the Charisma Podcast Network.*