

Completing the Life Cycle: Soul Care

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Notable writers refer to life's spiritual stages. Shakespeare described the last stage of human existence as historical second childhood when sensory functions diminish. Psychologist Eric Erikson described nine stages of progression in *The Life Cycle Completed* by Joan M. Erikson. The relationships broaden beyond the family; they contribute to integrity and reliability or despair and disgust in old age. Hope, will power, purpose, competence, fidelity, love and consideration for others accumulate a well of wisdom. On the other hand, mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority, confusion, isolation and stagnation result in a barrel of despair.

Life's positive spiritual process includes moral, emotional, motivational training which refines awareness of self, others, and God collected as a well of wisdom identified in *Five Stages of the Soul* by Harry R. Moody. Flourishing spirituality demands attentive response to an invitation that includes a search for guidance, struggle with seeming opposites, surging break through, and becoming changed. Aging and illness direct confused wondering to embracing a belief about the meaning of life and death.

Integration of spirituality into all facets of life provides vitality even in the eventuality of death. Trust in supportive others and in a God-power beyond the self, anchors the soul. Both the caregiver(s) and the care recipient rely on strength beyond what is human. Hope for reliable and available support establishes the fact that the family is not alone. Courage to face short or long-term illness forges out peace and perseverance.

What are some reinforcing faith strategies used by those who deal with illness and pain? Prayers of confession and thankfulness acknowledge dependency on a higher being to provide inner peace in spite of the physical reality. Quiet moments of meditation on life philosophy and religious beliefs redirect attention to let go and relax into the hands of the All-knowing. Humor, thinking

about what makes God laugh, helps one to transcend the limitations of physical humanness. Music, art and nature lift the spirit or calm the doubts of the soul. Shared needs cut sorrow in half but multiply joy.

Honesty through open communication with the family and a spiritual leader frees one from hoarding fatigue, questions, emotions, questionable decisions and doubts. Spirituality invites letting go of control of things that cannot be changed, change what is possible and the wisdom to discern the difference. Presence with one another is an extension of divine presence to activate forgiveness, complete unfinished business, affirm permission to die and provide comfort.

Spirituality encompasses body, mind and spirit. Spirituality describes one's belief in divinity and is expressed through rituals, and practices. Psychology examines the personal search for guidance and making sense of life. The social group of a spiritual community encourages spiritual practice in relationships. Though highly subjective, spirituality energizes how caregivers and recipients interconnect and deserves nurture. One goal of spirituality is to moderate the emotional, physical, and relational domains within families as they deal with illness, dying and death.