

Top Tips



Faith in
Later Life

Welcoming People Living with Dementia

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Rooted in Scripture: What does the Bible say?

The Bible reminds us that we are loved by God (John 3:16). That love invites us into community with one another, a radically inclusive community which, in turn, loves others with the love of Christ.

For those with dementia, we have the assurance that our relationship with God is not based on us knowing God but on God knowing us. We are written on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49v16). God knew us in the womb, before we knew ourselves, and there is nowhere we can go outside of God's presence (Psalm 139).

We are equipped to pray, the Spirit interceding for us with groans our words cannot express (Romans 8:26).

Therefore God is active in the lives of people who are living with dementia.

- ✓ Reaching older people with the good news of Jesus
- ✓ Discipling older Christians to become like Jesus
- ✓ Mobilising them to be disciple-makers

Fostering Fruitfulness: What difference can this make?

Our needs for love, agency and social ease do not change when we have dementia. However living with dementia can be isolating, for the person with dementia and for those walking with them.

It is important to maintain connection for several reasons:

To provide care for those with a recent diagnosis to help them explore what this means for them and those they love. To encourage people to be involved in church activities. To combat societal attitudes to dementia, reminding people that people are valued by God and by us.

There is also evidence that remaining connected to friends and activities makes a difference to how the dementia progresses. Our warm welcome is an act of love.

Tips at a glance

Learn from
the person

Hold a
sacred
space

Provide a
welcoming
space

Ask the right
questions

Support
meaningful
service

Faith in Later Life's Top Tips

1

Learn from the person with dementia

Individuals experience dementia differently, so avoid making assumptions. A person living with a dementia has a lot of expertise in living with the illness, so listen to what they say and how they react to things around them. As the condition progresses, you might need to spend time understanding the need behind something they say.

2

Hold a sacred space

People living with dementia are loved by God but can be isolated from faith community. Familiar hymns, prayers, and Bible verses provide opportunities for connection. Singing is great for the brain but also offers a space for someone to offer their praise to God, to be part of community, and receive ministry.

Further Inspiration

For more on this subject, please head over to the Resource Hub on our website at faithinlaterlife.org.

If you lead a ministry among older people in your church or Christian community, we'd love you to join our network – it's free and you can find out more on our website.

3

Provide a welcoming space

Being dementia friendly is more than physical changes, for example offering clear signage with visual prompts. It also includes ensuring the congregation are dementia confident, knowing how to welcome someone living with dementia appropriately, offering dementia buddies to sit alongside someone during a service, and providing an opportunity for full time carers to have some respite.

4

Ask the right questions

Try not to ask questions that rely on short term memory. Instead of asking 'how was your week', start chatting about things that you know they were interested in before, and see where there is a resonance. Introduce yourself and your connection to the person when you visit, and don't be distressed when someone doesn't remember your name.

5

Support meaningful service

Helping people to continue to contribute to church ministry is important and supports their much-needed connection with others. This might mean putting signs on the cupboards to help people find where the cups are to set up coffee after a service; buddying up to prepare prayers; or being creative about how someone can keep serving.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.' Psalm 92: 12-15

