

# Resources for spirituality and aging

## An annotated bibliography

Jane Kuepfer and Andy Brubacher Kaethler

***Aging: Growing Old in Church.* By Will Willimon. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 192 pages. \$21.99 (US).**

Will Willimon is a highly respected theologian and retired church leader in the United Methodist Church known for his deep and careful integration of Bible, theology, and pastoral ministry. In *Aging*, Willimon draws on biblical wisdom to speak to contemporary realities of aging, such as vocation, economics, and relationships. For Willimon, both individual faith and the church are resources for aging and retiring “successfully.” He does not soften the multitude of challenges of aging, but neither does he soften the power of faith, hope, and wisdom for all who are aging. This book would make a great resource for a Sunday School or sermon series.

***Being with God: The Absurdity, Necessity, and Neurology of Contemplative Prayer.* By A. J. Sherrill. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021. 176 pages. \$16.99 (US).**

If you find the Enneagram a helpful tool to better understand yourself as a spiritual and relational being, you may find A. J. Sherrill’s *Being with God* a fascinating read. Sherrill weaves together biology with theology and experience of life in contemporary culture to advocate for the value of contemplative prayer. The good news is that you do not need a science or theology degree to understand and appreciate this book. Regardless of one’s age, stage in life, or spiritual type, Sherrill winsomely shows that we can all benefit from the practices of slowing down, breathing deeply, and encountering God in prayer.

***Dementia-Friendly Communities: Why We Need Them and How We Can Create Them.* By Susan H. McFadden. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2021. 240 pages. \$35.00 (US).**

Grounded in research into dementia-friendly communities around the world, *Dementia-Friendly Communities* rises above stereotypes and assump-

tions and counters stigma related to dementia. McFadden, who is actively involved in dementia-friendly initiatives in her own community, inspires new ways of thinking about possibilities for ongoing mutuality in relationships in church and community and provides practical examples from her experience. This is an inspiring book for anyone wanting to help build a more dementia-friendly community.

***Dignity and Grace: Wisdom for Caregivers and Those Living with Dementia.* By Janet L. Ramsey. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018. 178 pages. \$18.99 (US).**

As a chaplain, pastoral counselor, family caregiver, and researcher of resilience among older adults, Jan Ramsey writes candidly in *Dignity and Grace* about the challenges of dementia. Concluding each chapter with a meditation on a psalm, she grounds the Christian practices of giving and receiving care in the emotions of the psalmists, from lament to gratitude, and so much in between (disappointment, love, forgiveness, and so on). Stories and quotes from interviews with caregivers build the narrative around the importance of both dignity and grace. Caregivers and those who support them, including pastors and therapists, will appreciate this book.

***Lighter as We Go: Virtues, Character Strengths, and Aging.* By Mindy Greenstein and Jimmie Holland. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. \$18.95 (US).**

In *Lighter as We Go*, clinical psychologist and author Mindy Greenstein and geriatric psychiatrist Jimmie Holland bring their expertise from the scientific and medical fields together with ancient wisdom and personal experience to discuss the role of virtue and character in the aging process. These women suggest that while aging includes changes and losses, it also includes new freedoms and insights. By intentionally developing virtues such as transcendence, humor, wisdom, social justice, and courage, we are better able to embrace losses and welcome emerging gifts in aging. The book is filled with useful information, presented in accessible language and stories. While it is not dismissive of faith and religion, the book lacks theological reflection that persons of faith may be looking for. Nevertheless, this is a great resource for individuals or small groups of persons in middle-age and older looking to develop healthy psychological, emotional, and relational practices to embrace aging with fortitude and gratitude.

***Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia through a Spiritual Lens.***  
By Kenneth Carder. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 192 pages.  
\$22.99 (US).

In *Ministry with the Forgotten*, Kenneth Carder, United Methodist pastor and bishop and theological voice for the church, takes a deep dive into his personal experience of his wife's journey with dementia. He explores, from the inside, what dementia means theologically and the insights his reflection on experience have given him into relationship with God. Honest and real, this book is helpful for the church and its pastors and for all Christ-followers seeking to understand faith that privileges cognition in new ways. Masters of Theological Studies students have appreciated this book immensely.

***Reclaiming Joy Together: Building a Volunteer Community of Real Hope for Those with Dementia.*** By Daphne Johnston. Montgomery, AL: Respite for All, 2020. 238 pages. \$14.99 (US).

Daphne Johnston has a profound love for people, especially those living with dementia, and has led her church, and now many others, to build volunteer-based communities of friendship and belonging. *Reclaiming Joy Together* is a practical book that shares not only inspirational stories but also guidance for creating such a community in your area. This book can help churches use their assets—space and caring people—to meet a burgeoning social need confidently and enthusiastically, with the inclusive love of God.

***You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News.*** By Kelly M. Kopic. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022. 272 pages. \$24.99 (US).

For those who are struggling with their finitude—mortality, physical decline, unrealized goals—Kelly Kopic's *You're Only Human* provides a robust and insightful theological account of the contemporary and historical attitudes toward human limits and how to develop healthy dependence on God and others. Kopic addresses questions about aging, including intellectual dimensions, with plenty of references to theological reflections throughout the centuries. Kopic ultimately address some pragmatic questions: Have I done enough? Are the limits of my body bad? Do I need to be part of a church? This book will appeal to those who are looking for a cerebral companion to process everyday challenges of aging.

### **About the authors**

Jane Kuefer is the Schlegel Specialist in Spirituality and Aging with the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging and Conrad Grebel University College. She is a spiritual director, an ordained minister, and a registered psychotherapist, and she serves as a spiritual care provider in a retirement home. Jane coordinates an annual Spirituality and Aging Seminar and is convening the 2023 International Conference on Ageing & Spirituality.

Andy Brubacher Kaethler is associate professor of Christian formation and culture at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Previously he was a pastor in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. As he progresses through mid-life himself, he is becoming increasingly attentive to spirituality as a key ingredient for healthy aging.