

Guide for Facilitators
The Third Phase of Life:
Senior Empowerment Conversations
Hope Partnership



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Esquire magazine's article on New York Mayor Bloomberg indicated that a previous mayor said of his city, "New York is where the future comes to audition." (Esquire, Feb 2011, (90).

2 January 1986, New York (NY) Times, "Text of the Address Delivered by Mayor Koch at His Third Inaugural," pg. B5: says "**New York is the place where the future comes to rehearse.**"

These quotes got us to thinking, "**Where does the future come to audition or rehearse when we retire?** How do we find a place to audition the new self that we are becoming? When we get a glimpse of what that new self might be, where do we go to rehearse the role that we are becoming?"

When we were young, those of us who were fortunate enough to go to university went there to audition and rehearse the new self that we were becoming. But, where do we go to do that when we are late in life and changing our way of interacting with the world.

In these sessions we gather to create a place for our future to audition and rehearse.

Welcome to your important role as guide for the introductory conversations with people in their third stage of life. Why did you say "yes" to guiding these conversations? We bet it has to do with your personal experiences in moving beyond middle age, your love of God and your compassion for those who surround you in life now. One of the gifts of age is that we have all had the chance to experience life and love in many ways. And that is your primary gift in this role as one who guides the conversations with others who also have lived life long enough to collect lots of experiences, good and bad, and been in lots of relationships, sustaining and diminishing. You are a fellow traveler on this journey.

You are not being asked to manage the people with whom you are meeting, but rather to guide the conversations to allow for the wisdom that is in the room to emerge. This shared wisdom will lead to insights and honest, transparent sharing which will allow each person to become a companion on this journey. You will have a roadmap to guide you, but expect conversations to find a "road not taken" and take it! You will be provided with what we hope might be outcomes of your conversation, but count on the fact that other things will come out of the community of conversation as you collect your ideas, hopes, fears, questions and answers. Indeed, these conversations have the potential to create a community of mutual support and accountability with one another. You are the facilitator that walks with the group as they gather to reflect on what it means to experience fully the joys of living in what Sister Joan Chittister, in her book The Gift of Years, calls the harvest time of life. And you will get to that joyful harvest through the

pathway of honest, and sometimes painful, sharing of individual life experiences and all that has been gained and lost along the way.

This guide for the introductory sessions is organized to provide you with:

- A focus for each conversation with anticipated outcomes
- Ways to prepare for leading the conversations
- A pathway for your conversations with questions upon which to reflect

Both the introductory conversations and the later extended conversations invite all participants to read and reflect on Sister Joan Chittister's book, The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully and Dan Moseley's book, Lose, Love, Live: The Spiritual Gifts of Loss and Change. The extended conversations are based upon Dan Moseley's book, Lose, Love, Live, with questions in this guide for each of the ten conversations based upon the book.

We leave you with four things we believe:

1. Nobody owns this! Use it. Adapt it.
2. The expertise is in the community of conversation you are going to have.
3. There will be a galaxy of insights
4. This process will evolve and improve with the sharing of your stories and experiences in the conversations you have.

We invite you to contact Jim Powell at jimpowell73@me.com for more information, to ask questions or to give feedback to other groups of seniors engaging in these conversations.

Purpose and Hopes for the Introductory Conversations

This is an introductory series of conversations for those who have or are approaching the phase normally called retirement. Actually a more comprehensive word to describe this stage might be "reorientation" as the leaving of one major portion of our life work, identity and energy creates opportunities to explore other options to live out our lives in meaningful ways.

The conversations can occur in a couple of ways: four sessions of two hours each over four weeks; or, a one day or overnight retreat with four components spread over the time and mixed in with play, worship and additional building of community. The hope for these conversations, however they manifest themselves, is that people will experience the joy of the journey toward readiness for what is next.

Our goals for these introductory conversations are:

1. To begin listening for our individual song in the absence of whatever identity defined us for so long (our jobs, another life situation like parenting or caregiving),
2. To hear our songs by welcoming the divine Stranger who is within ourselves and others; and,
3. To taste the abundant life that is possible through the nourishment of a new way of being.

These conversations will prepare the participants to decide if they would like to continue this community of conversation, support and accountability for an additional ten weeks, exploring in more depth what it is to be in this third phase of life in empowering and life giving ways.

Conversation One

Welcoming the Stranger

Focus:

In this component we will explore how the leaving of one major portion of our life work, identity and energy creates within us, and those who surround us, strangeness about life that requires adjusting toward a new sense of who we are.

Preparation:

As you prepare to lead your peers in this discussion, reflect about your life's chapters and how change created the loss of your identity as you knew it and the creation of a new sense of identity and purpose.

Think of songs and poetry that speak to this loss of identity. One example is Billy Joel's song: "The Stranger". Another example is Robert Frost's brief poem, "Secret," that includes the words, "We dance around and suppose, while the secret sits in the middle and knows." When you think about and feel what has happened to you in the loss of your identity, how does it make you feel? What does it cause you to think?

Put yourself in the situation of some you know who will be participating in these discussions. What have been the words that define them over time and now?

Finally, be prepared to share, to the extent you are comfortable, your own issues with the strangeness and sense of loss that have come for you in the transition to this third phase of life. Doing so will model transparency and engender trust, creating a deeper sense of connectedness within the group.

Pathway:

Please watch a brief video on the web site or DVD with Dan Moseley, Dick Hamm and Jim Powell sharing what they envision for the participants through these discussions.

Name the purpose and goals for these conversations:

Purpose: Help people experience the joy of the journey toward readiness for what is next in their lives.

Goals:

- To begin listening for our individual song in the absence of whatever identity defined us for so long (our jobs, another life situation like parenting or caregiving)
- To hear our songs by welcoming the divine Stranger who is within ourselves and others
- To taste the abundant life that is possible through the nourishment of a new way of being,
- Invite people to introduce themselves by name, where they think they are in this journey into the third phase and why they chose to participate in these conversations.
- Share that we are giving ourselves the opportunity to slow down, look around and discover our song for now and the future.
 - Invite people to talk about people they know or have heard about who made changes in this phase of life which took them in different and meaningful directions.
 - Talk about the value of stopping for self-reflection and feedback
 - Share the example of Jesus stopping to reflect and receive feedback as to His identity. (Matthew 16:13-19)
 - Point out that there are no right or wrong answers – we are all on the same journey and will get to our destination through the sharing of our individual life experiences.
- Briefly go over our plan for these four sessions
 1. Introduction and focus on welcoming the stranger. (Suggested song: “The Stranger” by Billy Joel (NOTE: All suggested songs can be listened to or purchased on iTunes or found through a Google search))
 2. How do we find forgiveness and become excited about our future, moving beyond regret and into community that offers safety, making it possible to name and let go of our fears, (Suggested songs: “All Will Be Well,” Gabe Dixon and “It is Well With My Soul”)
 3. The Journey of Becoming. Learning to play again. (Suggested song: “The Marvelous Toy,” Peter, Paul and Mary)

4. Remaking our map. How do we taste the joy of the journey? How do I hear my song? (Suggested song: "The Music of the Night," Phantom of the Opera; "Sing God a Simple Song," The Mass)
- Introduce Joan Chittister's book, The Gift of Years and how the book will be used during the sessions:
 - Read a few quotes that resonated with you from the introduction.
 - Ask any of those who might have begun reading what they are getting (or not getting) from the reading thus far
 - Go over the concept of "burden and blessing" as a way to summarize each chapter. Invite participants to read a section a day and highlight things that are significant to them. We will spend 30 minutes each session hearing notable quotes from one another:
 - Session 2 "Regret" through "Newness"
 - Session 3 "Accomplishments" through "Limitations"
 - Session 4 "Solitude" through "Legacy"
 - What is strange about life for you now? Is there a part of your identity you feel you have lost in this transition to the third phase of life?
 - In triads discuss the following questions (and/or others brought by the group):
 - What part of life feels strange?
 - What does it feel like to be me now?
 - How is it different than when I was doing whatever I did in the past?
 - Why, do you think?
 - Do you think others ever see you as different? As a stranger? Why?
 - What are your or others responses to the strangeness of this time?
 - And how are you coping with the feelings that come with the strangeness of the times
 - Report out from triads what people heard or said.
 - Welcome the stranger and the strange because the Biblical Faith asserts that God comes to us in the stranger. (Read Genesis 18:1-15 and Luke 24:13-35)

- Watch video clip of Dan Moseley talking about the loss of identity that comes with loss.
 - In the Bible
 - In your life
- How can we welcome the stranger that is in us, in others, in God?
- Introduce Dan Moseley's book Lose, Love, Live: The Spiritual Gifts of Loss and Change.
 - Watch video clip of Dan talking about the book and how it can help us in the introductory conversations and beyond in the 10 week community of conversation, support and accountability.
 - Share what you, as the facilitator, found helpful in the Introduction of the book.
 - Invite participants to read the Introduction for further discussion in the next discussion.
- Closing reflections:
 - What new thought did you have today?
 - What old thought got reinforced?
- Closing prayer

Conversation 2

Focus:

Review of goals for our overall conversations together:

- To begin listening for our individual song in the absence of whatever identity defined us for so long (our jobs, another life situation like parenting or caregiving)
- To hear our songs by welcoming the divine Stranger who is within ourselves and others
- To taste the abundant life that is possible through the nourishment of a new way of being.

Goals for this conversation:

- Reflect together on the first chapters of The Gift of Years
- Reflect together on the Introduction and first chapter of Lose, Love, Live
- Examine the need for forgiveness of our past to be able to move into the future

Preparation:

How are you, as a leader, interacting with Joan Chittister's words in her book? Highlight and earmark quotes worth sharing with the group in order to stimulate conversation around the Chapters from Regret to Newness.

As you read the introduction to Dan Moseley's book, what are your feelings and thoughts? Jot them down in order to share with the group.

As you look back on your past, what are your feelings? Jot them down and allow them to speak to you. Dan's premise is that we must be able to forgive our past in order to be released into the future. How is that true for you? Can you think of instances when you have dealt with guilt, remorse or regret of the past? How have you dealt with those feelings?

Read Dan's book where this subject is addressed (Chapter 6) as a way to help facilitate a discussion on the matter. Be prepared for the feelings that exploration of this topic could bring to the surface for you conversation partners. Don't avoid those feelings, but treat them gently as they arise.

Pathway:

- Gathering, connecting, reviewing and praying together
- Reflections on “The Gift of Years”
 - Chapters to discuss: “Regret” through “Newness” (NOTE: Hold the chapter on Regret for last as background for exploration of the need to forgive the past to be released into the future.)
 - In triads, have people discuss the chapters, asking:
 - What did you highlight that were significant to you?
 - What burdens and/or blessings resonated with you?
 - Report out highlights of the triad discussion
 - In the full group, lift up notable quotes from the chapter on Regret
- Releasing our future from the prison of the past
 - Triad discussion: When you made a transition in your life from one stage (working, parenting, caregiving, etc.) to another (retirement) what did you have to give up or get free from?
 - Watch video clip of Dan talking about forgiveness of the past to free us into the future.
 - Discuss the video clip with the background of Dan’s chapter on forgiveness (Chapter 6, pgs. 77-84)
 - What choices opened up for you when you were freed from the routine of your previous work life or life situation?
- Listen to Gabe Dixon’s song, “All Will Be Well”
 - How do you react to the sentiment “All will be well, despite all the broken promises to ourselves?”
 - How can we say “All will be well” at the same time we are saying, “But I don’t know how?”
- Collect ‘ah ha’ moments from the group.
- Announce the next session will be about learning or re-learning to play
- Closing prayers

Conversation 3

Focus:

Review of goals for our overall conversations together:

- To begin listening for our individual song in the absence of whatever identity defined us for so long (our jobs, another life situation like parenting or caregiving)
- To hear our songs by welcoming the divine Stranger who is within ourselves and others
- To taste the abundant life that is possible through the nourishment of a new way of being.

Goals for Conversation 3:

- To discuss what we have experienced in reading Joan Chittister's book, The Gift of Years, chapters from "Accomplishments" through "Limitations"
- To share and rediscover the value of play in tasting God and life's abundance. (Read Chapter 8 in Lose, Love, Live)
- To release ourselves from the fear of not getting things just right which keeps us from "playing" with our future and taking risks

Preparation:

In this session you have the chance to lead your conversation partners into a time that allows them to actually experience play and its attendant joys and laughter. In order to do this, you will need to examine your own history of being able to play and how that has changed over time. As you think about this session, recall moments of play in your life so that you have those memories to share in order to stimulate people's recall of play in their lives and how it made them feel.

Play involves the willingness to let go of life's seriousness long enough to experience ourselves playfully. As you think about this, what are your own roadblocks to enjoyment of play. Note them, as they likely will mirror what others are feeling and will help lead to honest conversation about those roadblocks.

Pathway:

- Gathering, connecting, reviewing and praying together
- Reflections on “The Gift of Years”
 - Chapters to discuss: “Accomplishments through Limitations”
- In triads
 - Recap of the Burdens and Blessings as named by Joan in the book:
 - Highlights from your readings (things you liked or didn’t understand)
- Report out to all
- Let’s play!
 - Listen to the suggested song “The Marvelous Toy” by Peter, Paul and Mary
 - Play a couple of rounds of charades (or other participatory game of your choice)
 - Discuss as a group the feelings generated by the game.
 - What do you remember enjoying playing as a child? Why?
 - Play the video clip of Dan talking about the role and value of play
 - Watch the video clip of Dick talking about what he has gained through having hobbies throughout his life as well as the challenges of keeping up with his hobbies.
 - In triads, ask the questions:
 - What are your favorite ways to relax now? Why?
 - Is it, or is it not hard for you to play? Why?
 - Report out the highlights and insights gained from the triad discussions.
 - As a group discuss:
 - How play allows us to taste God’s abundance
 - How play can help us let go of the fear of failing

Closing reflection:

- What is staying with you from today's conversation?
- Invite the group to begin to reflect on what their new song might be.
- Closing prayers

Conversation 4

Focus:

Review of goals for our overall conversations together:

- To begin listening for our individual song in the absence of whatever identity defined us for so long (our jobs, another life situation like parenting or caregiving)
- To hear our songs by welcoming the divine Stranger who is within ourselves and others
- To taste the abundant life that is possible through the nourishment of a new way of being.

Goals for this conversation:

- Interaction with Joan Chittister' s book.
- Begin to listen for our song for this next phase of our lives.
- Reflect together on our previous conversations.
- Discuss possible action which might arise from these conversations for the benefit and/or transformation of your congregation, your family, your community.
- Discuss the option of continuing the conversations using the 10 week conversation guide.

Preparation:

In this, the final conversation in the introductory process for empowerment of seniors, you will want to create the time for your conversation partners to reflect individually on their emerging new song in this phase of life. You will also want them to taste what this time of life can mean to them as you introduce the opportunity of people participating in a ten week community of conversation, support and accountability. You will have the opportunity to introduce the actions that might arise from the group which could lead to their blessing the church and the world with their live, contributing to the transforming of congregations, families and/or communities. Finally, you will invite your friends into a covenant of additional time together to create an on-going safe environment to discover what it is to be in this third phase of life in new and empowering ways that make a difference in the world.

Pathway:

- Interaction with Joan's book, The Gift of Years
 - Triad discussions from this week's reading
 - Share thoughts and insights with the whole group
 - What are you taking away from Joan's book, specifically and in general?
 - What have you tasted/discovered through her writing?
- The phases of our lives thus far
 - Invite participants to write down the phases of their particular life as they would divide them.
 - Connect each phase with a song, a Chapter title or a metaphor that resonates with them (e.g., laps of the journey, symphonic movements, etc.).
 - Ask how reflecting on the past chapters of your life makes you feel.
- Reflections on this stage
 - List all that comes to mind as the gifts you have to give, the meaning you want, and the joy you hope for in this phase of life.
 - Watch the video clip of Dan, Dick and Jim on the benefits of discovering your song for this phase of life.
 - Spend time in reflection on what might be your song. (Suggested music as background: "Music of the Night" from Phantom of the Opera or "Simple Song" from Bernstein's Mass.)
- Relating our conversations to those taking place throughout the church as we seek to transform people and congregations through "A movement for wholeness in a fragmented world," part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Identity statement.
 - Watch video "Living Cloud of Witnesses for Hope Partnership for Missional Renewal (on the DVD or can be found on YouTube).
 - Discuss what actions you, as a group and as individuals, might take to give integrity and joy to your new sense of purpose (e.g. ministry with children in the church and/or community; ministry with the homeless; mentors with young people, etc.)

- Reflections and next steps
 - What in our four conversations and your reading of the book has been helpful?
 - What could have been more helpful?

NOTE: Please forward evaluation and feedback to Jim Powell at jpowell@churchextension.org
- The Value of Action
 - Discuss options to ground our song in actions that give it excitement and integrity
 - Join the Living Cloud of Witnesses for personal and congregational transformation, starting with your congregation.
 - Look at options of what we can do together for the good of the world and our church.
 - Discuss the proposal that there be ongoing conversations which give us time to explore further what we have only been able to taste thus far. Hand out the description of the ten week conversation series.
- Covenant for moving forward. (Download the “Living Cloud of Witnesses Covenant Card on the DVD or Hope Partnership website at www.hopepartnership.info)
 - Play the suggested music: “All Will Be Well” by Gabe Dixon while participants complete and bring forward their covenant cards.
- Closing prayers

Deeper Conversations about Life's Changes

Those of you who are reading this material have decided that you want to move more deeply into the discovery of what life has to offer in this third phase. You have come to a time of transition and change and have been in conversation with friends about who you are now becoming. Those conversations have blessed you and you have decided that there is more you would like to share and discover. You have experienced the healing that comes from sharing your journey with others in a caring community of conversation.

These next 10 conversations are designed to help you know more fully the gifts of your life as you have lived it and open yourself to the gifts of life that are yet to come. They will take you and your friends into some places that may be hard to face, but you are discovering that sharing your struggles as well as your joys helps you not only endure the pain but grow through it. You have discovered that others who are on a similar path contribute to your growing, even as your life and insights contribute to their self-understanding and discovery.

These conversations can take place over ten weeks and create a setting in which a group of people can grow more profoundly into supportive and helpful friends. You may decide to focus on two conversations each week and finish the guided material in five weeks. Some groups may decide to explore all these issues in a weekend retreat, thus creating a relationship building event where there is time not only for guided conversation but for eating and playing together. Design your own strategy to serve the needs of those who are part of this conversation.

It is important to know that deeper conversations may cause some pain and suffering. Know that the conversations are not necessarily the cause of the pain. The pain is probably there within us and voicing it helps us bring it to the surface so that we can know it and more effectively deal with it. You will also experience joy and laughter in these conversations as stories are shared.

These conversations are not therapy groups. You and the group may find there are things that surface that the group is unable to deal with. If the feeling of pain in the room is too great, take a break. Help the person who is upset hold the pain. Contact the minister or a professional who might be able to help the person deal with the deeper unresolved material that has been surfaced. If the person loses control, it might embarrass them. Stay close and let them know the group is a safe place and it is OK. As you discover joy and delight, laughter and hope,

rejoice in that as well. As you experience fun or holy moments along the way, name and celebrate them as you “taste the abundant life.”

The journey of discovery that you and your friends are on is your life. You are not waiting to live. This is a scenic highway along which you can stop and enjoy the scenery together. You can share the pain and pleasure, the joy and sorrow and in so doing find comfort for the sorrow and more intensity in the joy.

Now is the time to discover the community of friends who will accompany you on your journey, the deeper self that opens up to you in this new time of life, and the God who was sustaining you in your past and who will accompany you in your future.

Each participant will need their own copy of Dan Moseley’s book, Lose, Love, Live: The Spiritual Gifts of Loss and Change.

Outline for all Sessions

1. Set out the snacks and drinks and spend time welcoming each other.
2. Catch up with each other by finding out what has happened in the time you have been apart.
3. Have a moment of prayer to invite God to share in your time and bless your conversations.
4. Identify a song, hymn, poem or scripture that might hold hints to the topic for the conversation.
5. Read the introduction to the questions in the session.
6. Begin to ask the questions that are listed.
7. Encourage those who have not spoken to do so. It is helpful when people can voice their own experience. Don't force people to speak, as some participate by listening. Give plenty of silent time so that people can listen to the voices within their own soul.
8. Pick up on the conversation and ask questions that grow out of the insights of the group. It is not necessary to use all the questions in the guide; they are there simply to stimulate the conversation.
9. Note significant insights on a flip chart or chalk board. This helps people see something that might simply be a hunch within their hearts.
10. At the end of the session, ask people what they discovered or what other things they might like to discuss.
11. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for the group and the lives they have shared.

Naming Losses

When we make changes in our lives, opportunities blend with losses. To discover and live into those opportunities requires the grieving of the losses. Any significant change will result in some things disappearing. And generally anything that is lost has multiple layers. When we work for a company and quit that work, we lost our job. But it isn't just a job. It is a place to go each day. It is a group of people who count on us to be there. It is co-workers with whom we associate. It is a structure that fills the hours of the day. It is a sense of being worthwhile or valuable. This is also true if we have spent our days raising children or other kinds of care-giving. Our time is not our own. We are at the mercy of others needs. When children leave home we lose their presence. When someone for whom we care has died, the space is empty. We also lose the structure that made claims on our lives. We lose the companionship that nurtured us. We lose the conversations, both hard and pleasant.

Learning to live again in the absence of an identity that structured our self understanding requires that we name the losses that have resulted in our change. When we name those losses, we can see them clearly and we can grieve them. If they remain unnamed and unidentified, they hide in the soil of our psyche and sometimes grow into weeds that hold us in the past and keep us from moving forward into the future.

Read chapter one of [Lose, Love, Live](#) and see how this works. Help one another in the group identify the multiple levels of loss that have been experienced.

Questions for Conversation

- Every major change in life results in loss, even while it may create opportunity for gain. Does this statement resonate with you? Why or why not?
- What change happened in your life that brought you to this conversation?
- When this change occurred, what was the primary thing you lost?
- When you lost this important part of your life, were there other things that disappeared as a result of that loss?
- Make a list of the other losses that came along with the primary loss.
- Is there someone you can identify who might help you name these losses?

Feeling Pain

When we experience the loss of something significant we feel pain. We seldom feel pain at the loss of something that doesn't matter. To learn to live again in the absence of a job or a vocation that gave our lives meaning and significance can be a very painful experience. It is important to feel that pain even if it is not pleasant or enjoyable. It is good to have a safe place and people to hold you while you feel that pain. A group of people who know something of the pain that you are feeling can be a holding place for you. Shared pain is always easier to bear even as shared joy is more delightful.

It is important to feel the pain that comes with loss. Feeling pain helps you identify what was important about that which was lost. When you feel pain over not seeing your children or your co-workers as frequently as you did when you were working within your previous structure, you know how important relationships are to you. Feeling the pain of the loss not only helps clear the struggle out of your system, but it helps you begin to identify those things you want in your new life.

Read Chapter two and share your insights with those in the room. Hear one another's pain and help the group identify what matters to them. Create a safe space for them to share their frustrations. This will help free them and also free you to discover that you are not alone in your struggle.

Questions for Conversations

- Can you remember what feelings you experienced the day after the significant change occurred? What were they?
- Did this loss bring up memories of other losses?
- Did the feelings you had scare you? Why?
- How did you express those feeling?
- Did you share these feelings with others? Were they able to help you name and express them?

Anger

Anger is the physical response to threat. While we may feel joy and relief when we retire or are freed from responsibility of care-giving, we also lose something that matters to our identity. When we have experienced ourselves as people who play a certain role and that role is no longer a part of what we do, we get off balance. It is disorienting and hard to know who we are (see pages 52-53). When we experience this threat to our self-understanding, our body produces adrenaline, which gives the body the resources to defend itself by either fight, flight or freeze. When we have lost our sense of who we are, anger can be a gift that helps us focus what we need to do to learn to live again.

But anger can be scary. It can feel like energy out of control. It can scare us because of our experience with others who have been angry. It can scare those around us because it feels unpredictable. We can turn it inward and attack ourselves. It is important to identify these feelings of anger and understand that they are a normal response to the loss of something that matters deeply to us. By naming and feeling that anger in the presence of people who can hold it with us, we are able to understand ourselves more fully and focus the energy toward discovering our future rather than blaming ourselves or those who are around us.

Read Chapter three and share your stories of threat and anger that you experienced when you made this significant change in your life.

Questions for Conversation

- Did you have any feelings of anger at the time of your loss?
- Did you feel guilt about your anger?
- How did you express your anger?
- Did your anger frighten you and/or make you feel powerful?
- What about your identity was threatened when you had this loss?
- Did your anger scare other people?
- Did you feel like a stranger to yourself when you were so angry?
- Who can you share your anger with?

Remembering

Many people think that the way to move forward is to forget the past. Forgetting the past is discounting the gift of life that we have lived. It is devaluing ourselves and those with whom we have lived life. The past was valuable and real. What we did with the first and second phases of our lives has helped shape who we have become. It has provided us stories and experiences that are the resources from which we draw for living into the future. Therefore, learning to live beyond our loss is not about forgetting but remembering.

But it is about remembering honestly and well. If we just remember the pleasurable things or just remember the painful things about the past, the past will be distorted and not serve us well as a foundation for our future.

Remembering the past well results in our seeing it for the truth it was--both good and bad, both painful and pleasurable--that is, it reflected our human condition. As we get in touch with the true humanity of what our lives have been, we are freed from the need for the past to define our future. We are freed from the power of the past to control our future. We are free to discover who we really were so as to have knowledge of ourselves. This insight can be useful for helping us see what we can become.

Read Chapter four and share stories which represent who you were. Remember and tell the full story so you can discover the full truth of the self that can emerge in the future.

Questions for Conversation

- What do you remember that you really enjoyed about life before the significant change?
- What do you remember about your loss that was painful?
- What do you remember about that life that helps you know what really matters to you?
- Who helps you remember well what you have lost?
- As you have remembered your life before loss, did you discover any other losses that you can name?

Guilt

Loss of something significant brings guilt. We often find ourselves thinking, “I should have done something different.” Or, “If only I had lived differently.” People, when their children leave home, often find themselves wondering if some of their children’s struggles could have been avoided had they spent more time with them, or if they had helped them study more, etc. After a lifetime of working to provide for a family, individuals often feel guilty that they didn’t spend more time with the very family they were supporting.

Guilt is a reflection of the truth about human community. We feel responsible. We make commitments to other people and many of those are unspoken. When the relationship changes or we have completed a phase of our life, we wonder if we were responsible in the right way. Some people feel guilty because they are no longer being productive in society in the way they understand productivity.

It is important, however to sort out what feelings of guilt represent something for which we are actually responsible and what might be guilt grounded in unrealistic expectations. When we have a significant loss, we are sometimes tempted to carry around more of the burden of responsibility for the loss or not living as we wanted before the loss. It is helpful in moving forward with our lives to discover which is which.

Read Chapter five and discover how real guilt is. Explore what you were responsible for and those things you could have done nothing about.

Questions for Conversations

- Did you feel any guilt after the change and loss you experienced?
- Did you feel any regret about what happened in the loss?
- Do you feel guilty about leaving the job or position that you held?
- Is there something about your new situation that makes you feel guilty?
- Are there those around you who make you feel guilty?

Forgiving

To learn to live again in the absence of something significant requires the ability to navigate the space between what was and what is yet to be. The past has power. The disappearance of something important from our past can cause us to fixate on the past. Forgiveness is becoming free from the power of the past to control the future. It is not being freed from memory. Memory is what grounds us in our identity. But, to allow our memory to consume our present and future is to be stuck there.

Forgiveness is that which frees us from the control of the past. It is that which we experience as a gift when we discover that the past is important but that we do not need to remain there to feel comfortable or happy. The offenses of the past may need to be rectified, but they do not need to consume us. When we discover strength to begin to move forward, we are accessing the forgiving spirit of God. This strength comes when we work through the pain and anger of the past and identify the losses of the past. It comes when the past is remembered as human and not divine, thus being something that we can disengage from.

Read Chapter six and identify the powerful parts of what you have lost. Begin to wonder what you could be without those identifying markers in your life. Imagine new names to call yourself that reflect the new possibilities of your life.

Questions for Conversation

- Were there things in your previous phase of life that you didn't do but had hoped to do?
- Are there people from your previous phase of life whom you wish you could have spent time with but whose forgiveness you would need to ask first for that to happen?
- Are there people in your previous phase of life that you need to forgive?
- What memories of the past seem to keep you locked into them and prevent you from imagining a new beginning?
- Are there things for which you need to forgive yourself?
- Are there things for which you need to forgive God?

Gratitude

When you have remembered and named what has been lost, you begin to get in touch with things about your life for which you are grateful. You will know forgiveness of yourself and others has begun when you can look at the past and find gifts for which you are grateful. Some gifts are hidden, others lying in the open. Gratitude in face of loss does not diminish the value of what no longer exists, but simply acknowledges appreciation for what life has offered.

The ability to be grateful helps the healing process. We grow spiritually by acknowledging the gifted nature of life. When we see the gifts of the past, we can open our eyes to the possible gifts yet to be given in our future. When fear of the future can be replaced by anticipation of the possible gifts of the future, our eyes are drawn forward and we can move more confidently toward that future. Gratitude frees us from the power of the pain and hurt that can hold us in the past and cause us to miss the opportunities for the future.

Read Chapter seven and consider the gifts of pleasure and pain of your past and then begin looking forward to the gifts hidden under the veil of the future.

Questions for Conversation

- What about the change in your life has been good?
- What can you now do that you were unable to do in your previous phase of life?
- What about your previous life would you like to give thanks for?
- What were the gifts that came to you in your previous phase of life?
- What are the gifts that come to you because you have made a change?

Play

Play and experimentation are the way the future teases us into the possible. When we are children we play at dress up, we play at school, we play at driving. Play is that grace-filled time when we can test untried parts of ourselves to see if they might become a more significant part of who we are yet to become.

The ability to play with and imagine a new future is related to our ability to trust in grace and forgiveness. If we are afraid of making mistakes and being wrong--a fear that dominates many adults for whom mistakes might cause them to lose something they value--we will not have the courage to play with becoming something new. If, however, we can try out new ways of being in the world and know that we don't necessarily have to commit to them, we can discover possible ways of living that can fulfill us and serve others at this time in our lives. Play is the setting in which your future can audition.

Read Chapter eight and fantasize about what you can do, now that you are not caught in the same systems that demanded so much of your life in the past.

Questions for Conversation

- What have you always wanted to do if you had time?
- When you were young, what did you enjoy playing with?
- What has troubled you when you were in your previous phase of life that you would like to try to address now?
- What are you curious about?
- Can you imagine yourself in a new place or doing new things?
- What hobbies did you enjoy in your previous phases of life that you might like to revisit?
- Is there anything in your life that you have always dreamed of doing?
- What voices from your past intrigue you as you imagine your future?

Practice

When we begin to learn something new in our lives, we must develop discipline and practice if it is to become a part of who we are. When a child plays football in his backyard, he can make up the game and the rules and explore his skills. But, if he decides to become part of the high school team, he must move from simply playing to learning the rules of the game and practicing his skills so that they become second nature to him when he is in a game. This is true with discovering our new life in the third phase of living. When we have discovered some things that interest us we must then make a decision to invest more of our time to developing that interest.

Practice requires not only interest but commitment. This isn't easy if you have discovered the joy of the freedom that can come with retirement. But most people do not want to simply play their life away. We want some balance between pleasure and meaningful work - activity that makes some contribution to the world which has nurtured and shaped us. Finding that place and making some commitments to invest our time and energy on its behalf is important for our becoming new creatures in the absence of the old way of being.

Read Chapter nine and explore what might interest you enough to commit the time necessary to become more accomplished in that activity.

Questions for Conversation

- Is there something that you are discovering in this new phase of life you would like to explore more deeply?
- As you look at how you spend your time, can you make a choice to do more of one thing and less of another?
- Can you make a commitment to some new thing and still leave room for some exploration of other interests?
- Are you able to discipline yourself around the new choices you make rather than allowing others to define who you will be?

Becoming New

Living again in the absence of life as you knew it is the goal of the spiritual journey. Change is always opening up new possibilities for us. To embrace that new life, and to welcome it as a gift, celebrates our faith in God as the giver of life. To become new, however, is not something that we can do. Rather, it is a gift that grieving the loss of the old opens us up to. By paying attention to the journey of discovery, and attending to the gifts that we have received along the way, we become attuned to acknowledging the gifts that keep coming to us.

As you move forward in your life beyond the life that you have known, imagine and experiment, taste and see, embrace and live. The gifts of the divine are in each age, part of each phase of our living. The symphony of our lives has many movements, each with dissonance and harmony, struggle and blessing. Allow yourself to discover the fullness of what God has created you to be.

Read Chapter 10 and share the discoveries of who you are becoming.

Questions for Conversation

- What about your new phase of life do you now find comfortable?
- What are you now able to do that would trouble you if you had to give it up?
- What new things have you discovered about yourself as you have awakened to this new life?
- What is more fun now than it was when you first changed into this third phase of life?