

We Have This Moment

Written by Dr. Larry Watts, MS, DMin

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.



We only have this day. **LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME; ENJOYING ONE MOMENT AT A TIME.** We only have this moment, this day. Yes, we do need to make wise plans for tomorrow. We need to seek grace to let go of our regrets from the past. We also need to limit mass media that only wants to scare us.

We need to take deep graceful breaths and live each moment with gratitude. Actually, taking deep breaths could be a ritual that will invite us to live the moments instead of allowing yesterday and tomorrow to crowd out the gift of now. **NOW IS ALL WE HAVE.**

Nowhere Man

“He's a real nowhere man
Sitting in his nowhere land
Making all his nowhere plans for nobody
Doesn't have a point of view
Knows not where he's going to
Isn't he a bit like you and me?”

The Serenity Prayer has the power to ground us in the moment. The prayer crosses most faith boundaries. The Twelve-step program uses it in every meeting. It comes with many wonderful gifts by offering us many promises so we can stop the inner commentary to enjoy moments.



Life comes to us one moment at a time. Grace is given to us to enjoy life one day at a time. This gift includes the graces we need to not “future-trip.” Future-tripping is driven by fear where we imagine a future where bad things happen. Future- tripping robs us of living in the moment.

We can also “regret-trip” our moments by unresolved past issues. The only control we have over our back-stories is forgiveness. One of my favorite writers is Thomas Merton who said, “I don’t want to climb the ladder to the top and realize my ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.”

There is research that working jigsaw puzzles is good for the aging brain. Many stop and work the puzzle because they want to support their brain and because they simply love to work the puzzle.

On any given day in many retirement communities, you will find at least two card tables with jigsaw puzzle pieces laying there waiting for someone to come by, stand and look in hopes of finding the one piece that will only fit in that one space. It is a small thing, but it is very satisfying.

In front of the jigsaw pieces is the box the pieces came in. The box stands there, vertically, proudly shouting, “This is what I will look like once you finish with me.”



Those who spend hours working on the puzzles hate the one who comes by, looks to make sure no one is around, quickly grabs a piece, puts it in his/her pocket, and slowly walks away. He/she will casually walk by every 2/3 days to see how the puzzle is progressing and when it needs that last piece, with no one looking, reaches into his/her pocket and quickly puts the last piece in its place and leaves.

The serenity prayer is a good comparison to jigsaw puzzles. Someone has said, “God can put all the pieces together, but we have to give God all the pieces.”

Let us talk about the pieces that need to be put on the table because each piece, like a jigsaw piece can only fit in one place.

FIRST PIECE begins with what most people are yearning for and that is serenity. We may use different words, but we are yearning for peace that allows us to live each moment and each day with meaning, purpose, and joy. **“GOD GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THOSE THINGS I CAN NOT CHANGE.”**

This is the bottom line. Until we stop investing most or all of our energy in trying to change the things that cannot be changed, we will have no energy to place the other pieces on the table where they belong. A friend of mine said, “I only have ¼ of a tank left in my life and I want to use it wisely.”



When we find ourselves trying to change the things that cannot be changed, it is a call to prayer for God to help us lay that first piece on the table, trusting God with that critical piece.

SECOND PIECE: “GRANT ME THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.”

PLEASE hear this, the only one that I can change is me. I wonder if that can only happen with God’s grace. God waits for us to come to that place of recognition and sends the help we need to make the changes. It will surprise us with the help that comes.

When it comes to changing that which can be changed, wisdom plays a major role. Wisdom is God’s gift that will show us the way.

You may know what would change a situation for someone, but wisdom says, “Keep your wisdom to yourself. They are not ready to hear what you

have to say.” As someone has wisely said, “When the student is ready, the teacher will show up.”

What can we change?

1. We can learn to live in the moment by practicing gratitude. When we are grateful, we are living in the moment. I am sitting here looking out my window thanking a large maple tree for its gift of oxygen. By choosing to be thankful, I am in the moment.
2. We can practice forgiveness and if we cannot forgive we can be willing to be willing to forgive. If we cannot forgive, we can seek help in learning how to forgive. I love the story about the woman who said to a prominent man. “I have been hating you for years and it has not hurt you at all but it has almost killed me.”
3. I can develop friendships. Those with chronic disease struggle more if they are lonely.
4. I can learn how to pray. Prayer is simply being as honest with God as we know how. But what if I don’t believe in God? How do I pray? The Twelve Step program used by Alcoholic Anonymous provides space for this question. They promote this understanding by simply saying, “Pray to the God of your understanding.”
5. I can practice the silence of “letting go.” I spend at least twenty minutes each day with intentional silence.
6. I can journal. Sometimes my journal includes prayer where I simply ask God, “What is it you want me to know?” I settle into silence and listen to the language of my heart.
7. I can exercise. Those with Parkinson and other diseases know that movement is crucial.



THIRD PIECE comes as a gift of knowing that we only have this moment. We only have this day. **“LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME; ENJOYING ONE MOMENT AT A TIME.”**

Life comes to us one day and one moment at a time and as I said earlier, “future-tripping” or “regret-tripping” robs us of the gift of this moment. Several year ago, I stopped to get gasoline and had a “Be-Still-Moment.” The sun was setting and painting the western sky with colors that could not be described by human words. I could only say, “thank you.” And then in the language of my heart I heard these words: “I have been doing this all week, Larry.”

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” The Message Version by Eugene Peterson says, “Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me.”



FOURTH PIECE INCLUDES accepting hardships to become a pathway to peace. **“ACCEPTING HARDSHIPS AS THE PATHWAY**

We place this piece on the table with a recognition that it is hardships that become the university of hard knocks. It is here we pray for the grace to not waste the hardship by running away. Hardships may invite us to “future-trip” or possibly remember past unresolved issues. Both take us out of the moment and project us to places we do not want to go.

It is in the valleys that we are introduced to ourselves and the God that walks with us the in valleys. Most sacred narratives introduce us to men and women who were introduced to their true selves and God. God called them by name and gave them purpose and meaning.



When I face hardships, it is a call to prayer by asking myself and God, “What do I need to know about this that I don’t know?” It is here where trusted friends and God will be helpful.

TO PEACE; TAKING, AS HE DID, THIS SINFUL WORLD AS IT IS, NOT AS I WOULD HAVE IT.”

I worked in a head injury rehabilitation hospital for five years. I spent hours with men and women who were in deep comas. Some of them were so deep in coma that they did not even respond to pain. No one had written a book on how to do pastoral counseling with residents that could not communicate. There were many days that I wanted to run but I knew that God wanted me to learn from that environment so I prayed for grace and God provided it. It ended up being the hardest/best five years of my life.

FIFTH PIECE includes “**TRUSTING THAT HE WILL MAKE ALL THINGS RIGHT IF I SURRENDER TO HIS WILL.**”

I remember saying to God while working with residents in comas and emerging from comas, “God, I surrender to your will. May I learn what you want me to learn.” Afterwards I saw enough miracles to write a book. I remember asking Betty (not her name) what got her through the long weeks of rehab. She said, “My faith in God.” I then invited her to say more about her faith. She said, “My faith in God gives me hope and my hope is pulling me

into the future.” She had been with us for nine weeks which included demanding therapy every day. She had to learn to talk, walk, dress herself, and feed herself. It had been a hard nine weeks with more weeks to go but she allowed her faith to produce hope that was pulling her into the future.



SIXTH PIECE INCLUDES taking a hard look at the concept of what it means to be happy. **“THAT I MAY BE REASONABLY HAPPY IN THIS LIFE AND SUPREMEY HAPPY IN THE NEXT.”**

I am thankful the prayer uses the words “reasonably happy” because none of us is happy all the time. Life comes to us with both joy and pain. I wonder if the goal includes accepting the gift of faith God gladly gives. It is this faith that enables us to live in the moment with God, creation, and others.

No matter who we are, we can only live one day at a time. We can do it by accepting the grace God provides one day at a time by placing all the pieces on table.

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Dr. Larry Watts holds a Masters of Divinity and a Doctor of Divinity degree with a specialty in Aging and Spirituality. He also holds a Master of Arts degree in Gerontology.

He has served as church pastor and as chaplain in hospital and senior living settings. These roles have familiarized him with the spiritual needs of adults as they face health and psychological challenges and end-of-life concerns. He encourages practicing gratitude, forgiveness, and living in the moment, trusting God through all stages in life. He reports that helping others on their spiritual journeys has been the greatest privilege of his life.

