

Introduction

Looking Back and Giving Forward: Finding Common Ground for Positive Aging is designed to engage small groups of elders in developing a compelling vision of what it means to age successfully grounded in their Christian faith. Through this workbook, your vision can become a living legacy that contributes to making this world better for you, grandchildren, and future generations; and in this way makes the world a better place for all people.

This workbook is designed for a group experience that becomes the common ground on which you will look back and give forward. Though best experienced through a group, the workbook can be used individually as well. In advance of each session, you are invited to read and consider the many questions which you can re-visit at other times during your study.

The Lumunos relational small group process will provide you with a sacred and safe experience, and you will have the opportunity to:

- Discern the legacy that you have received from our Creator;
- Reflect on how you want this legacy to shape your future towards ever-increasing wholeness;
- Identify the God-given enduring strengths, core values, and beliefs that guide your future actions;
- Discover ways in which wisdom can be shared with family and community; and
- Build a supportive community to help sustain you now and in the future.

Each of the seven sessions has a theme, goals, readings and exercises, questions for sharing and discussion around the theme, and a "bridge" question for the next session. Biblical stories are used to help discern what God may have in mind for participants. Group leaders are trained in using the content to build a sacred and safe group experience for all. Sharing is done within a listening context that aims to affirm each individual's experiences and not to fix or give advice. You are encouraged to write your thoughts, musings, and questions in the workbook or keep a journal or notebook. Much will come to light as you delve into the material and its meaning for your life.

At the end of the program, it is hoped that the group will explore ways to continue in community to support one another over time.



Seeing Yourself as Sage

THEME: You are a sage living your legacy.

Scripture:
James 3:13-17
The Message

Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.

Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced.

Goals:



1. To create a safe and sacred space for sharing and examining the images of aging that we hold and that society perpetuates. Where do they come from? What is their impact?
2. To invite you to think about a potentially more fulfilling vision of aging that might guide you in the future. What might this vision entail?
3. To validate that your age justifies your status as a guide and gives you every right to seek ongoing fulfillment in its evolving forms.
4. To introduce the concept of legacy in all its fullness. It is not just a matter of money or family heirlooms.
5. To introduce the concept of call in all its fullness. Call is not just a matter of vocation.
6. To share stories of people in your life whom you have seen as sages. Who guided you?



Faith and Light for the Journey

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A legacy is bestowed from a forerunner to a follower. From a trailblazer to a tenderfoot. From a mentor to an apprentice. From the knowledgeable to the novice. It is a gift. It is an act of teaching and trusting. It coalesces from the layers of lived experience and is delivered into the heart of the future. You are a bearer of this gift, and it is a significant one. You are the trailblazer, the mentor, the wise one. Whether you know it or not, you are a sage—you have wisdom to bestow.

Not all sages are elders, but all elders are sages. You have earned this title through the life you have lived and the millions of experiences you have navigated over the years. At this moment, you may be thinking, "Well, maybe I am a sage, but if so then sages aren't what they used to be." That is true: sages are not what they used to be because the sages we need are the sages of the age we are in now. The wisdom we need is the wisdom of now. Every moment is a transition from what has been to what will be, and who better to guide us than those who have the most perspective on what has led us to who we are now?

Now you may be thinking, "I may qualify as a sage in some things, but by no means am I wise in the ways of the world these days." True. You might not get the latest gadget or use email or FaceBook. But a sage sees deeper. A sage seeks the essences on which the fleeting facets of our lives are hung. A sage seeks God's wisdom. As the scripture says, wisdom is "gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced."

Know this: You are a venerable elder, and you are **living a legacy**. Why living a legacy instead of **leaving a legacy**? Simply, you haven't left yet, so at this moment you're not leaving anything. The French moralist Joubert wrote, "The evening of a well-spent life brings its lamps with it." Your light still shines!

Know this: You are a sage, and your legacy is essential. So what is it, this legacy of yours? Over the next seven sessions, as you find and define your living legacy with your fellow seekers and God's help, you will live into your legacy and come to understand its character and dimensions. Are you ready?

What is this session about?



A Legacy is bestowed from forerunner to follower...It is an act of teaching and trusting. It coalesces from the layers of lived experience and is delivered into the heart of the future.



What is legacy?

This is the central question of this program, and we will return to it many times with new insights as we develop our personal and shared understandings. Let's begin with a journal question.



Opening Reflection

What comes to mind right now when you ask the question ~ what is legacy?

Webster defines legacy as "something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or a predecessor." This definition follows the common understanding of legacy, but we are going to introduce a new way of thinking about legacy by asserting that elders live their legacy as much as leave their legacy.

As a way of framing the wide scope of the process ahead, here are some possible characterizations of legacy.



Legacy contains the whole range of human experiences, and like the core of a human being, it is both unique and universal.

Legacy is the bestowal of what you believe God may be calling you to impart to those around you. As you frame your personal search for legacy over the weeks ahead, try not to restrict your definition. God may be calling you to a new and deeper understanding of legacy ranging from the mundane and material to matters of mind and spirit. It can even include certain things you have little choice about such as genetic traits. You should feel free to go beyond your current concept of legacy, to endow it with what you feel is God's truth for you and your community, now and in the future. Legacy contains the whole range of human experiences, and like the core of a human being, it is both unique and universal. How rich a search it will be!



- genetic traits (appearance, abilities, interests, conditions, disease)
- material things (wealth, property, heirlooms, mementos)
- opportunities (enterprises, affiliations, experiences, possibilities)
- information (family tree, dates, addresses, recipes, medical history)
- history (historical events, context, local impact, documents)
- traditions (holidays, food, places, songs, stories, allegiances, observances)
- religion (denominational ties, worship practices, theological tenets)
- spirituality (living into wholeness, contemplative practices, exploring the meaning of the Creator)
- memories (experiences, turning points, details, skeletons-in-the-closet)
- understanding (impressions, advice, meaning, beliefs, spin)
- perspective (life course, wisdom of hindsight, patterns, diversity)
- personality (emotion, humor, voice, reactions, passions)
- identity (connection, continuity, purpose, values, faith)
- love (sense of being cared for and valued, belonging, self-worth)

A Living Legacy - Beyond the Money



*Have you ever thought of
some of these ideas
as being a part of
your living legacy?*

In his book *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (1997) acknowledges that we are surrounded by many negative images of aging. These images of aging come from many places such as youth obsessed media, how elders are treated, and what we have seen modeled for us by others, to name a few. But Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi is energized by an alternative vision for growing older.

What is a sage?

They [elders] are wisdom keepers who have an ongoing responsibility for maintaining society's well-being and safeguarding the health of our ailing planet Earth. They are pioneers in consciousness who practice contemplative arts from our spiritual traditions to open up greater intelligence for their late-life vocations. Using tools for inner growth, such as meditation, journal writing, and life review, elders come to terms with their mortality, harvest the wisdom of their years, and transmit a legacy to future generations.





*Wisdom is a combination
of our outward and
inward journeys, deriving
from experience,
reflection, and our
relationship with God.*

Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi encourages people to become aware of the images they hold about aging. He believes that we must change the aging paradigm we all carry inside. That is exactly what we are asking you to consider—a new paradigm of growing older by living your aged, not just leaving it. “Much like software that we insert into the active memory of a computer, the program that we run dictates whether we will have a fearful, unattractive old age or a creative, fulfilling one. (Schachter-Shalomi, 1997)

In short, a sage is a wise person. Wisdom is a combination of our outward and inward journeys, deriving from experience, reflection, and our relationship with God. In many cultures, elders have been respected, held up as paragons of wisdom, as sources imparting communal identity. In these societies, it is celebrated that elders have taken a longer journey and have developed a broader perspective—that if there is such a thing as enlightenment, it is likely to flow from them.

Where would that enlightenment come from? As Christians we would say it comes from God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit flowing through us in our inward journeys. We do the work of becoming a sage in many ways such as:

- reflection on our relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and worship in a community of believers;
- reflection on the self and the relationship of the self to family, community, and world;
- connection of the self to guiding principles, be they religious or secular, spiritual or material, textual or intuitive, unwavering or evolving; and
- realization that there is a tangible connection between self-fulfillment and reaching out including the willingness to risk rejection when reaching out.

**How do you see
yourself now?**

Our society is fickle. One minute we hold someone up to be celebrated and the next we may ridicule them. In our journalism, our entertainment, our education—indeed, in our storytelling, the fundamental way any society passes on cultural knowledge—we are a community of judges. You have probably felt judged many times and never more so than as you have aged. Ours is not a society that reveres its elders, at least, not as we should given all that has been imparted to us.



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Path and Light for the Journey

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Let's pause for some reflection around these journal questions about how you see yourself.

1. Ask yourself how you feel society judges you as an elder.
2. How much does this matter to you?
3. How much of your personal identity comes from outside, and how much comes from within?
4. What messages do you receive about yourself from family, friends, caregivers, service people, strangers, the media, politicians, and most importantly, God?
5. What other images or experiences have shaped your perception of your older self?

**Journal
questions**



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Key for workbook symbols

 ~ Goals

 ~ Journal Questions

 ~ Guidelines

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