

The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully

Joan Chittister

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There's no such thing as having just one life to live, Chittister argues—life is a mural of multiple pieces, every part serving its own purpose. And every part allows us to adapt, to change, to cope. The forty-one short chapters in *The Gift of Years*, each almost a mini-sermon, are challenging, yet comforting at the same time. A Benedictine sister, Chittister is a counselor, a Catholic activist who supports women's rights, a writer (with more than thirty-five books published), and a faithful believer in a God who loves her and everyone else.

Chittister, who is seventy and claims she is not yet “old” (though she reserves the right to redo this book when she turns ninety), presents universal themes of aging: fulfillment, nostalgia, hope, forgiveness, adjustment, joy, and more. What's important in growing older is not how we look to others (witness how much is spent on wrinkle cream and plastic surgery) but, rather, the way we look at life. She rejects the choices of loneliness and neglect; she encourages great connectedness with new friends and old and finding a sense of purpose, resulting in the joys of adaptation and change. When we retire, we should ask ourselves, “Who am I, now that I'm not what I used to do?” And the answer is pure freedom: I am who I am, free to do whatever I want, free to serve, to learn, to share, to befriend. There is no time for regret. What we must not do, she concludes, is do nothing. *The Gift of Years* is a welcome resource for ministries and retirement homes, and reading again and again.

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