

## **DEMENTIA AND FAITH**

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Things change as a person ages. Movements aren't as rapid, looks have changed and things aren't thought through as quickly. Many times, therefore, people begin to eliminate things that once were an important part of their lives. One area that seems to radically change for many elderly is the playing out of faith in their lives. I have heard families comment that mom or dad would never use "that kind of language" or would never act in "that way." While it is true that in the past our loved ones would never have acted as they currently are or said the things they currently do, the reality is dementia has set in or a debilitating stroke has taken place. What was normal in the past is now not normal. A common phrase that is often said is that there is now a "new" normal.

Another change that often occurs is participating in Bible studies, or attending church services and devotions. Now that our loved one has dementia or has moved into a care center that doesn't always seem to be able to be a part of the weekly routine. It takes a lot to help someone get ready to leave the house and then there are the problems of transportation, walking, bathroom breaks, eating, inappropriate comments, etc.

Life *has* changed, but one's faith has not left and God's love for our loved one has not changed either. It is true that our loved ones may use language that was never condoned in the past or display actions that are less than admirable. But previously our loved ones did not have dementia, had not suffered a stroke, and did not have MS, Parkinson's or any other debilitating ailment. Who they are/were is still present, only now it is masked in the dressing of a disease.

If you are the primary caregiver for your loved one at home it is important to offer the opportunity to continue to worship, whether at home or in an actual church building. It may not work physically to take your loved one to a worship service or a Bible Study, but why not invite your pastor, priest, deacon, elder or Bible study leader to your house to visit and read the Bible with them? If you are a pastor, priest, deacon, elder or church member, why not offer to come to your friend's home to do a Bible study or have devotions?

Care Centers, such as Pondera Medical Center, know the importance of caring for the physical and emotional needs of each resident. That includes offering devotions, church services and Bible studies. Residents do not have to participate but they are given the opportunity to do so. Praising and worshipping almighty God does not *have* to be within the context of a church building. Many of you may have witnessed people who can no longer clearly speak or say words that can be understood, but when they participate in a time of singing favorite old hymns they can sing along, carry a tune and voice the words of the songs. What a blessing to experience!