

VESSELS OF LOVE

Prayers and Poems for the Later Years of Life

Joyce Rupp

ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

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Published by Orbis Books, Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302.

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"Befriending Physical Change" (adapted from "Befriending My Aging," *Prayers to Sophia*, Sorin Books)

"Moving Into a Senior Residence" (adapted from "Moving Into a Retirement Residence," *Out of the Ordinary*; 2010 edition, Ave Maria Press)

Illustrations by Regina Gelfer

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to: Orbis Books, P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rupp, Joyce, author.

Title: *Vessels of love* : prayers and poems for the later years of life / Joyce Rupp.

Description: Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, [2024]

Identifiers: LCCN 2024004583 (print) | LCCN 2024004584 (ebook) | ISBN 9781626985926 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9798888660485 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Older people—Religious life. | Aging—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Devotional literature.

Classification: LCC BL625.4 .R86 2024 (print) | LCC BL625.4 (ebook) | DDC 242/.65—dc23/eng/20240308

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024004583>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024004584>

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INTRODUCTION

*I do not exist in order that I may possess;
rather I exist in order that I may give of myself,
for it is in giving that I am myself.*

— *Ilia Delio*

Have you ever thought of yourself as a “vessel of love?” This is what I envision for the elderhood years. The vast experiences of the past have provided countless opportunities for our love to grow and mature. The persons who entered our lives, what we’ve done or had done to us, the beliefs stretching our minds and hearts, what we gained and shed, the results of our choices and decisions, our deliberate participation in the evolving history of the world—all this and more we bring with us into the final decades.

During this lifetime, whether we’ve been aware or not, a Presence of immeasurable love has been flowing through those experiences, quietly filling the vessel of our inner being. Like vats of matured wine, our ripened

goodness has readied itself to move outward. The Beguine mystic, Mechthild of Magdeburg, trusted that “the great flood of divine love never ceases. . . . It flows on and on effortlessly and sweetly and without failing until, finally, our tiny vessel becomes full and spills over.” Now is the time to tend “our tiny vessel” so this graced goodness strengthens in us and goes on to benefit the life of those we encounter.

While current interactions may differ from the past, our daily living continues to be a central catalyst for our ongoing transformation, thus enriching our encounters. In these remaining years, endless opportunities will emerge for the precious gift of our love to be generously extended. Whether healthy or ill, living alone or with others, mobile or physically confined, if our intention is to be a person of great love, life will provide plenty of conditions for us to be a container of this kindheartedness.

The image that Angeles Arrien uses to introduce spiritual growth in the *Second Half of Life* is that of a crucible. She describes this as “a fired-clay vessel used to contain high-temperature chemical reactions. In alchemy, the medieval science and philosophy that sought to transmute base metals into gold, the crucible was the vessel in which the transformational process occurred.” The author then connects this scientific process to the natural course of aging: “In spiritual

alchemy, it is a symbol of the capacity to change or transform. It is a container that reveals what is authentic within it.”

This application surely applies to the later part of life, an era of steady change and continual adjustment. It is a period of life fueling the “chemical reactions” that refine our authenticity and the integrity of our love. When we are open and attentive, these situations stimulate change within us, purifying and reinforcing the core of our truest self. So much can distract us from this process, whether it be endless medical concerns or disturbing issues of loss in wide-ranging forms. Rather than being frustrated or questioning whether we are worthy or able to be all we wish to be, let us focus on how our current life serves as this crucible where we can intermingle ever more intently with divine love and allow the resultant gift to flow forth abundantly from our lives.

The prayers and poems in *Vessels of Love* are meant to support and energize your ongoing personal transformation. It is my intention that the book’s content will bolster your spirit, ease the burdens you carry, and assist you in continuing to grow in your ability to be a loving person in the midst of whatever positive or destabilizing circumstances come your way.

I want to assure you that you are not alone in what you long for and experience as you age. *Vessels of Love*

not only serves as a source to facilitate and uplift your personal journey of aging, it also assures you of kinship with others in these final years—a time when much of what develops for other older persons is not all that different from your own, even though the expression of it varies.

Because we each pray in our individual way and name the divine Being according to our personal understanding and comfort level, please adapt my wording according to what seems best for you. I hope that what you find here strengthens your relationship with the Source of Life and Companion of Death. May personal harmony reside and increase in you, a vessel of love, and brim over with eagerness to be shared.

At the end of each prayer you will find questions or suggestions for further contemplation and assimilation of the topics and content of the prayers in *Vessels of Love*. These prompts could be used for personal reflection and journaling, for small group gatherings, or any other way in which the focus of the prayers is further developed and strengthened to enrich the lives of those involved in this process of integration.