



**My faith  
+ My journey  
+ My memories  
+ My life**

**It all adds up to**

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**Livability**

**My faith matters**

A resource to support the spiritual  
journey of people living with dementia.





# My faith matters

## A spiritual wellbeing resource for people living with dementia

*My Faith Matters* is a resource that has been developed to support people living with dementia to maintain, reconnect with, and explore what brings meaning to their life. It can be used by individuals, families, and churches, as well as health and social care practitioners.

We hope that this resource will help people who are living with dementia to explore and record what matters to them, whether it is reading the Psalms aloud or sitting in the sunshine watching the world go by. It's all those small things together that add up to a person's spiritual wellbeing. Since no two people are the same, what brings meaning to a person's life will always be unique.

As a person's dementia develops they may be less able to communicate what matters to them, which can be upsetting and isolating, both for that person and their friends and family.

The way to find out what matters to someone and to capture that is to spend time together. This may also involve spending time with the other people who are important in a person's life, but these contributions should never eclipse the contributions of the person themselves. It is essential that we honour what matters to each individual.

### What is spiritual wellbeing and why does it matter?

There is no single definition of either spirituality or wellbeing, and both express broad concepts. While talking about what matters to a person living with dementia, it may be that these phrases are not used at all. For those who are part of a church community, it could include everything from prayer and worship to other associated activities. What is important is that these concepts relate to what brings meaning to a person's life and apply to more than one area of life. For this reason it is essential to take a holistic approach to ensure a clear understanding of an individual's views to be able to define what spiritual wellbeing means to them.

# Meaning + Wellbeing + Support



## What this resource isn't

When it comes to spiritual wellbeing and what matters to us, one size does not fit all. What brings one person joy may bring another person stress and anxiety. Not everyone likes organ music, or busy all age services at church. While one person may value a quiet afternoon alone, another person may enjoy being around other people. We may also appreciate different things on different days, or at different times during the day. The goal of this resource is not to file it away, never to see the light of day. Instead it is to be used as a place to capture what matters in a person's life so that it is recorded, honoured, and enabled.

This resource is not a care plan, which combines a person's life history and their care and support needs, or intended to offer guidance for emergencies, or end of life care, although a person living with dementia may want to discuss how they would like to be supported in the later stages of their dementia.

## Is this resource just for people living with dementia?

While this resource has been developed for people living with dementia in particular, a helpful guiding principle may be to consider how we might answer these questions whether or not we are living with dementia. Spiritual wellbeing matters across the life course, so taking some time to consider how *My Faith Matters* is to honour that aspect of our identity right now, as well as honouring the lives of the people we are walking alongside. It may help the process for you to answer the questions for yourself first.

## Is this resource just for people who identify as having 'a faith'?

While this resource is certainly intended to be used by churches to support members of the church family who are living with dementia, even when a person does not identify as a Christian, or having 'a faith', it is equally important to find out what brings meaning to their life, and honour that. Tune in to what matters to the person you are spending time with, and let this guide the language you use.

# Tips and ideas for how to use this resource

## Preparation

- **Try to frame your time together as a chat.** Direct questions can be overwhelming, especially a series of questions in a row, which can feel more like a formal assessment than a relaxed chat.
- **Check the person is comfortable and they can hear you.** Repeat, or re-phrase a question if needed.
- **Consider how you might answer the questions you are asking.** If a question feels invasive or very personal, it's very likely someone will be reluctant to answer.
- **Look for clues in a person's environment.** Do they have a rosary by their side, a journal, or a collection of poems. The pictures in a person's home can also give clues about family, or holidays a person has taken, but never draw conclusions without asking.
- **Ask friends and family who can help to build up a picture of what matters to a person.** Importantly, though, it is the person themselves who must be the first port of call to explore what matters to them.
- **Be open to supporting a person to explore new aspects of their spirituality, like a holding cross, new hymns, or companionable silence.**

## The conversation itself

- **Start by asking how someone is feeling that day, rather than launching into questions about their life.** It can be overwhelming to be asked so directly about what matters to someone. If someone is not in the mood to chat don't carry on with asking questions. It's most important to be with the person in the moment.
- **Ask one question at a time, and show interest in what the person has to say.** If one question leads on to several stories, there's no need to stop the person in their tracks to ask another question.
- **Let the pace of your conversation be set by the person you are with.** If some of the questions bring up some happy memories, enjoy time reminiscing. The conversation may also bring up difficult memories. Rather than brushing these aside or making light of these, allow a person the time they need.
- **Share some things that are important to you.** For example, if you mention that you enjoy spending time with your grandchildren, a favourite hymn, or a particular radio programme, this can help to encourage people to share what matters to them. The goal is to share the right amount, to help to draw someone out.
- **Re-visit a topic a number of times and on different days if possible, as other details may come up.** It may be that a person has enjoyed gardening throughout their life, and when you talk about it again you learn that they particularly enjoyed growing tomatoes.
- **Record what a person says in their own words.** For example "I like spending time with my friends" rather than "She likes spending time with her friends". It is important to honour what matters to someone by recording what matters to them in their own words, and from their perspective.

# 1. About Me

**+** My Name / What I like to be called

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**+** Where I have felt most at home during my life

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**+** Where I feel most at home (a place, who I am with)

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**+** What brings meaning to my life/things that are important to me

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# 2. People in my life

**+** Important people throughout my life

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**+** People who are in my life at the moment

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**+** People I would like to continue being a part of my life

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### 3. My favourite ways of being in touch



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### 4. My daily routine How I like to spend my time



Every morning I...

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During the day I...

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Before I go to sleep I...

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At the weekend I...

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On Sundays I...

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## 5. Things that bring me peace and hope



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## 6. Things that worry or upset me

■ I sometimes feel anxious about...

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■ I sometimes worry about...

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■ I sometimes feel lonely...

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## 7. Life lessons I would like to share



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## 8. What I want near me

■ It's important that I have these things around me...

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## 9. Things I like to help others with

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## 10. Things I need help with

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## 11. Please help me to remember...

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**I will not forget you.  
I have written your name on the palms of my hands.  
(Isaiah 49:15-16)**

# Possible questions to ask



## Question 1

### Try asking:

- I wonder, where have you felt most at home during your life?
- Where do you feel at home now? Home may be being with someone rather than a particular place.
- What is most important in your life?
- What brings meaning to your life right now?
- Would you say that you have a faith?
- Is your faith important to you?
- How has it helped you throughout your life? Perhaps in difficult times?
- Are you part of a church or faith group?
- Do you go to church regularly?
- Do you pray, either by yourself or with others, for example at church?
- Do you have any prayers you say regularly for example, the Lord's Prayer?
- Would you like to pray with someone?



## Question 2

### Try asking:

- Who do you like spending time with?
- Are you in touch?
- I wonder, who do you think knows you best?
- Who have you been close to throughout your life?
- Tell me about your family / friends.
- Is there anyone you miss? Tell me about them.



## Question 3

### Try asking:

- How do you like being in touch with people? By phone? In person? While some people find it difficult to speak on the phone, others really value this contact, even if it is a short call to check in. Some people value notes in the post, or postcards.

## Question 4

### Try asking:

- Is there anything you like to do first thing in the morning / during the day?
- Are you an early bird or a night owl?
- Tell me about your day.
- Are there any parts of the day you particularly enjoy? For example, sitting in the sunshine, enjoying a cup of tea mid afternoon.
- Do you have a favourite place to sit?
- What type of view do you like? For example the seaside, the park, a busy street.
- Are there times of the day you find difficult?
- What helps? For example not being rushed, not having early appointments, or going to an early church service.

## Question 5

### Try asking:

- When do you feel peaceful? Watching the sea, sitting outside, or listening to music. This can feel quite abstract, so it might be helpful to give an example of a time or scenario where / when you feel peaceful.
- Tell me about times that you feel happy?
- What do you hope for?
- What are you hopeful about?

## Question 6

### Try asking:

- Is there anything you feel anxious about? This could include environmental factors like preparing a meal or managing finances, or could be concerns about the future, or the end of life.
- Do you ever feel lonely?
- Is there anything that helps when you feel like that? Perhaps some company, speaking to a friend on the phone, looking at photos, praying, reading the Bible, or gardening.



## Question 7

### Try asking:

- What are some lessons you have learned in life? This often requires plenty of thinking time, and returning to. Wisdom and life lessons should not be expected on demand.



## Question 8

### Look out for:

Suggestions might include: photos of grandchildren, a Bible, rosary, a box of tissues, glasses, a book I'm reading, a glass of water, my radio, church notice sheet, daily newspaper, remote control, church phone book, notepad, fresh flowers, a view of the garden. A person's environment may give clues, if they are surrounded by the things that matter to them.



## Question 9

### Try asking:

- What do you like to do?
- What are you good at?

This could be anything from being on the welcome team at church, to cooking, gardening, singing or painting, to being an encourager or good company. We all have strengths and something to offer, even if people don't feel confident about these or need help identifying their skills.



## Question 10

### Try asking:

- Is there anything you find a bit tricky?
- Is there anything you need help with to keep doing the things you want to do?

This could be anything from going upstairs, getting to the shops or church, attending a group, knowing what day it is, or reading letters.



## Question 11

### Try asking:

- I wonder, what would you like to remember always?

No two answers will be the same but may include the love of family, the love of God, particular life events or special times, as well as difficult times that were navigated, particular passages in the Bible, songs or poems. It may also be the day to day details that improve a day, like tea made just the way you like it, or listening to a favourite radio programme. Make a note of anything a person would like to be helped to remember.

# Further information

## Livability is helping churches build communities that are livable for everyone.

Livability is the disability charity that connects people with their communities. We tackle social isolation and the barriers that can cause this in the lives of disabled and vulnerable people. Through a wide range of disability, education, training and community services, we promote inclusion and wellbeing for all.

Together, we work to see people take part, contribute and be valued. We put the elements in place that all add up to connected lives and communities.

As well as dementia inclusive resources, Livability supports Christian community development through:



### The Happiness Course

Livability can train and support you to give your neighbours practical tools for a happier life.



### Community development skills

Our experienced practitioners pass on their skills in Livability training courses. Subjects include management, working with volunteers or trustees, retaining a Christian identity and more.



### Accessible church

Through audits, advice and training courses, Livability helps churches become places where disabled people are welcomed, included and truly belong.



### Dementia Inclusive Church

Through workshops, events and resources, we support churches to take the next steps to becoming dementia inclusive.



### Coaching programme

Whether your church has been working in the community for many years, or is just about to start a brand-new project, Livability experts can work alongside you, with advice and a fresh perspective.

If you'd like to keep up to date with Livability's church resources, visit [www.livability.org.uk/resources](http://www.livability.org.uk/resources) or email [joinin@livability.org.uk](mailto:joinin@livability.org.uk)

**It all adds up to**

**Livability**

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