

The Serenity Prayer - What Does It Mean?

This beautiful Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr has inspired countless people seeking peace and strength in times struggle, despair, and uncertainty since it was first written.

The intention of the **Serenity Prayer** is to **bring peace, faith, and certainty to the mind and heart** of those seeking God's support. It asks God for the wisdom and ability to gracefully accept "what is," (what cannot be changed) and for the willingness to manifest, with God's support, that which is in one's highest good. (Courage to change the things which should be changed).

The **Serenity Prayer** acknowledges that **if one seeks true peace and happiness in this life and beyond**, it is important to consciously live and enjoy one's life in each moment; embrace one's struggles and challenges; accept the world as it is, not as we would will it to be; and trust in God and surrender to God's Will thereby uniting our will with His.

History Of the Serenity Prayer

The "**Serenity Prayer**" is one of the most well-known prayers of our time. It is the common name for a prayer originally written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the late 1930s to early 1940s. Research suggests that Niebuhr wrote the prayer for as part of a sermon he was giving.

While there is some controversy as to whether Niebuhr was the original author or not, Elisabeth Sifton states in her book, **The Serenity Prayer**, published in 2003, quotes the following version as the original serenity prayer:

"God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

According to researchers, it is believed that the first version of the serenity prayer was quoted from memory in a question to The New York Times Book Review dated July 12, 1942. The query requests the name of the prayer's author. In reply to the request, the Book Review identifies Reinhold Niebuhr as its author and quotes the prayer as follows:

"O God and Heavenly Father,
Grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; the courage to change that which can be changed, and the wisdom to know the one from the other, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

The Serenity Prayer became much more widely known in the 1950s after it was adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). In 1950, the AA Grapevine, a popular AA magazine, also named Niebuhr as the author, and the current Alcoholics Anonymous website identifies Niebuhr as the prayer's originator. The Serenity Prayer has also been used in Narcotics Anonymous and other Twelve-step programs.

It is interesting to note, however, that the version of the serenity prayer posted on the Alcoholics Anonymous website omits some of Niebuhr's original text:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and (the) wisdom to know the difference."

Reinhold Niebuhr himself discusses the Serenity Prayer and how it came to be in his book, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*. He states,

"... The embarrassment, particularly, was occasioned by the incessant correspondence about a prayer I had composed years before, which the old Federal Council of Churches had used and which later was printed on small cards to give to soldiers. Subsequently Alcoholics Anonymous adopted it as its official prayer. The prayer reads: 'God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.' ..."

Finally, Reinhold Niebuhr's daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, wrote a book about her father's famous serenity prayer entitled, *The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War*. In the book, Elisabeth discusses the the story and circumstances around her father's writing of the serenity prayer, the wide range of versions of the prayer, and the true essence of the [serenity prayer's meaning](#).

References to the Serenity Prayer

- The Serenity Prayer has become one of the most widely known prayers in the world. It touches peoples' hearts from all walks of life. Below are a few references to the serenity prayer from well-known singers, songwriters, and artists.
- The serenity prayer is referenced in Dan Brown's book, "Angels & Demons."
- The back cover of the Neil Young's album entitled "Re-ac-tor" includes the serenity prayer in Latin.
- Whitney Houston's debut album, "Whitney," includes a reference to the serenity prayer on the rear cover.
- The 70's rock group, Boston, sings about the serenity prayer in the song, "Higher Power."
- Sinéad O'Connor, the once famous bald singer of the 90s, references the serenity prayer in her song, "Feel So Different."
- Well-known rapper, 50 Cent raps the first two lines of the serenity prayer in his song, Gotta Make It To Heaven. He says, "Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change, the courage to change the things I can, but wisdom to know the difference."
- The soundtrack of the "Soul Food" movie addresses the serenity prayer.
- Famous 60's writer, Kurt Vonnegut, mentions the serenity prayer in his book, "Slaughterhouse Five."
- The serenity prayer has even made its way into the gaming world. In the well-known game, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, one of the Blood Elves recites the serenity prayer.
- In 2004, punk band Blood for Blood titled their album "Serenity," sings a song about the serenity prayer on track 2 of their album, and the lead singer recites the serenity prayer on the first and last tracks of the album.
- Finally, Olivia Newton John's Album, *Stronger Than Before*, includes a song entitled "Serenity," and references the serenity prayer within it.