

Transcript
Sherri Snider Interview
14.03: "When the Time Comes"

Andy: Today on *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, we have Sherri Snider. Sherri was the very first guest on this podcast back in [the] September/October timeframe, and we are going to do something a little bit different today and have her talk very personally about her mother becoming a part of the care that Baptist Homes provides.

So Sherri, just to kind of catch people up on where you have been over these last several months, could you just kind of give a brief update about what's going on in your life?

Sherri: Well, I have been working on my doctorate in ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I'm currently taking a couple of classes: one in conflict mediation between adult children and their aging parents, and one in integrating faith and Christian practice. I guess I'm proof that you're never too old to go to school. I have been with Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries [00:01:00] for 38 years. The last 26 I have served as the administrator.

And just as a matter of interest, Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries is a continuum of care retirement community that serves and provides care for seniors in all stages of life: from independent living all the way to skilled nursing.

Andy: Okay. Okay. I know from my own time at Midwestern doing the doctoral work, there's a lot going on with that. So we're not going to keep you long here today, because I know when we talked beforehand and even setting this up, you have a paper that you're working on...

Sherri: I have a paper but I'm real excited. I'll be happy to get that one done in the next few days, but I'm really excited about the one in my conflict mediation because there's a lot of difficulties that families [with] adult children have in dealing with their aging parents, whom they really desire to biblically honor. And so, that's going to be my next paper and I'm real [00:02:00] excited about getting to [the] writing on that one.

Andy: That topic is certainly pertinent today as well. We might touch on that just a little bit if you're comfortable in just a few moments, but, again, the overall idea of this particular episode is to help people to understand that children do need to help their parents realize there is a need for additional care, and that [it] does create conflict. You have been through that personally. You are an administrator, as you said, for Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries there in Arcadia, but you've had to go through this from a personal perspective.

So what made you realize that this transition, that the timing for this transition, was becoming necessary? What made you realize that additional care was going to be necessary?

Sherri: You know, it's interesting that in my role as administrator over these 26 years, I have admitted hundreds, close to a thousand [00:03:00] residents into Baptist Homes.

And now, I sit on the other side of the desk as the daughter and some of the things that happened [were similar] to my grandmother. A few years ago, my mother started experiencing things like forgetfulness, other signs of dementia; such as, she would accuse people of theft that didn't happen.

People that she trusted, she started to accuse them of theft. She was afraid of being alone. She would lose a thought in mid-sentence, which sometimes we all do, but this was becoming increasingly common for her. She started eliminating in inappropriate places. So these kinds of things are really somewhat difficult to talk about and to think about because my mom was [00:04:00] always so elegant and sophisticated and stately and beautiful. And for these things to start happening to her were very difficult for us as a family to deal with for her. She recognized that she was having these difficulties and it was very frustrating for her and she would even hit herself on the head and she would say, "This is my affliction that I am, that I'm having to deal with."

And so, we would talk about the fear that she would experience as a result of these difficulties, because she's had seen her mother go through these very same difficulties. So anyway, that's what really kind of started it. So that during that time, my stepfather was still working part-time and it became apparent that mom could not stay by herself. [00:05:00] And so the decision was made for them to move into independent living at Baptist Homes, with the idea that he could go off to work and that mom could come and participate in the daily activities of things going on within the facility. And that worked for a little while, but still, that really was not adequate. And so, we had a family meeting and the decision was made for mom to enter into assisted living at Baptist Homes. My stepfather stayed in the apartments and she came in to assisted living at Baptist Homes.

Andy: Okay. So many different things kind of led up to that understanding, obviously, as you said, your grandmother; her watching your grandmother; you watching your grandmother; your stepdad understanding as well; but, as you said, we all lose our train of thought. Sometimes we all have little bits and pieces, but there [00:06:00] was a grouping of these things that kind of happened and probably more frequently over a short period of time that kind of led to this understanding of this need. Is that, would that be a fair statement then?

Sherri: It is. And you know, here's the thing. Sometimes when people start experiencing dementia and loss, they cope with that by doing things like my mom did, like I told you that she would accuse people of theft. And when you accuse trusted caregivers and trusted family members of theft, that is really a coping mechanism for the losses that they're experiencing.

They do things like blame the accused, whine, and complain. Those are the ways that they cope. And so you started seeing those things happening with mom, as she tried to cope with the losses of her memory, in this [00:07:00] case; and that's how she would deal with that.

Andy: So this is a challenging thing, then. And one of the reasons why we want to have you share, and others share about their experiences in this is because many children, and when I say children, I mean, adult 50-year-old children, etc., are dealing, or will be dealing, with this. And so, before we talk about how this move helped, you mentioned just a few moments ago that you're about to write a paper (or once you finished the current one) on conflict in helping children, and adult children, again, and older adults, especially in a scenario like this, deal with conflict. So could you, I know you haven't written the paper, you probably haven't done much research, but you know this from experience perhaps personally, but certainly, as the administrator there, as you said, you've moved hundreds, if not a thousand... Can you just share a few details along [00:08:00] that line of thought before we talk about how this move has helped you, your mother and your family?

Sherri: It is a very complicated and complex situation because children, adult children, wish to be respectful. And sometimes the aging parent has expectations beyond what adult children can do. The aging parent is not cooperative with what needs to happen. There may be issues of safety. There may be financial issues that are in play. A lot of adult children are unaware of their parents' financial situation, because that was not discussed.

“That’s a very private matter that we do not talk about.” And so, they frequently come into this kind of a care situation blind; not even knowing what they’re dealing with. [00:09:00] I was thinking the other day about the greatest challenge that face older adults. In other words, what’s the hardest part about growing old?

And I think if I took a poll with caregivers, with adult children, even with older adults, they probably would not come up with the answer that I think is what the real difficulty and the real challenge is. I think they would give symptoms of what the issue is. But the real challenge is, I believe, adapting to loss.

You know, as we age, our losses come faster and faster and they become more and more difficult to manage because a lot of them are significant. There [is] loss of [00:10:00] independence and loss of family members and loss of control and loss of bodily function. And they might say, “Well, you know, the greatest difficulty is losing my independence or having to give up the car or having my vision, you know, diminish,” but really it’s adapting to those losses.

It’s learning to roll with life’s punches and trusting that our Lord will see us through those things. So I think that the greatest challenge is figuring out how to adapt and as adult children, helping our parents to do that in a way that is respectful and biblically honoring, but it’s a very complicated, really individual process.

Andy: Yeah that’s great. I really appreciate you saying that. In the class that I teach, I often share that with [00:11:00] students, that, you know, why senior adults [don’t] like change in the church because the rest of their life has changed, you know? And like you said, you coined it as loss: “But I want to hold on to something, you know...”

Sherri: “...something in my life to stay the same.”

Andy: Yeah. That’s a great thing. So, share the experience, then, from a family’s perspective, your perspective, your brother, etc., of your mother’s move to the Baptist Homes & Healthcare facility, Healthcare Ministries facility, if I can get that word out.

Sherri: So there were days when mom was very angry now. She’s always been familiar with Baptist Homes. She’s been in and out of Baptist Homes. And so, you know, she knew the Baptist home and the people there already knew her. So she came in with an advantage, but there were days nevertheless, that she was very angry. And most of those times that [00:12:00] she was angry, it was over being separated from her husband.

She did not like that. Nor did she like not being able to drive. She wanted to be able to drive. And I would say, “Well, mom, if you could drive, where would you like to go?” “Well, I don’t know. I just want to go.” I said, “You just want to be free.” “Yes. I want to be free.” So, overall, Mom acclimated well. She loves everybody there.

Everybody loves her and it’s not just because she’s my mom that they love her, because they love everybody. I have a security camera there and I can watch aware [of] the staff’s interaction with my mother, as well as all the residents. And I see them giving hugs. I see them taking her and the other residents by the hand. I even saw one day the maintenance man, take my mom by the hand [00:13:00] and guide her to a familiar area. That made me cry that the maintenance man did that.

Today, Mom really doesn't remember the names of my siblings. She remembers my name because she sees me the most, but she does not remember my siblings names. She now requires more nursing care and she has been moved to the highest level of care. All things considered, I think mom has a high quality of life.

She and I will laugh about things together. Sometimes I don't exactly know what we're laughing about, but we will share; I will share memories with her. That validates her life and the importance of her and her family. So those are very meaningful things that she and I even in her dementia can share.

I have a brother who is, [00:14:00] really is, a genius. He has an IQ of a genius and he's the brain of the family. And he sent me an email one day, not so long ago. And he said in his email, "I'm having increasing difficulty following a conversation with mom. I have a hard time understanding her answer to my questions and I'm having a hard time answering [and] understanding the questions that she's asking of me. What should I do?" I said, "Well, the first thing to do is to stop asking questions." I said, "Instead of asking, 'Mom, do you remember whatever I said,' you might take it from a different approach and say, 'Mom, I remember when we, blah, blah, blah, [00:15:00] and you did this, and I want you to know mom, when you did that, it made everybody feel so special [and] involved.'"

And so not only are you remembering for her, but you're validating her value within the family. And those are the kinds of discussions that I have with mom that are so meaningful. And like I said, it makes her feel very good and we can laugh about things. And sometimes we cry about things, but most of the time we laugh about things.

So, you know, all is good; things with mom are good.

Andy: Good. Good. For our audience, I do encourage you share. You just mentioned the idea of validating her mother. I encourage you to go back to the first episode if you've not listened to that, of this podcast. And she talks about validation therapy, as a part of that particular episode. So if you're not familiar with that concept, I encourage you to do that.

So, Sherri, by the time this [00:16:00] podcast airs, you will be thankful to know that the paper that you are currently writing will be done.

Sherri: Right.

Andy: So I would add, as I asked you in the shortened interview, how [can] the audience pray for you? You can, I guess I can, pray that you did well on that paper, but that paper will be in the past, but how else, obviously, as the administrator there, as a personal caregiver for your mother, and kind of a representative for your family, at this point, but just in general, how can our audience pray for you today?

Sherri: You know, I am so blessed. All during COVID, when nursing facilities around this country were on lockdown and families were unable to see their loved ones in the nursing home. I got to see my mother every day. So I remember a few years ago, and I can't remember if I shared this with you or not, but I remember a few years ago, when my mother's [00:17:00] dementia had not progressed so far, but she was in this process.

She said to me, "If I knew then what I know now, I would have been kinder to your grandmother."

I had a mentor when I first started with Baptist Homes who told me that it was her hope that the people who work in long-term care, who work at Baptist Homes would learn how to age gracefully, how to roll with life's punches. As we talked about earlier, I don't really know how I'm doing with that personally, but what I have learned and what I'm continuing to learn is how to deal well with my mother. I don't want to look back in 20 to 30 years and have regrets and say, "I wish I'd have been [00:18:00] kinder to my mom." Hmm. So how to pray for me?

I asked for continued patience and understanding for me and my family as we walk this road with my mama. We want to have no regrets and we want to love her.

Andy: Yeah. Well said for all of us: a challenge, a conviction, and an opportunity to pray for you as well. So, Sherri, I appreciate your time.

I know you're busy getting towards the end of the week, the paper that is upon you in more ways than one, I suppose, but, I appreciate these few minutes that you've shared with us and given a little bit of an inkling as to why, parents, I mean, children need to consider this for their parents and some of the benefits that might come from that.

But that last little bit about being kind [00:19:00]; we don't want to have regrets down the road. So thank you very much.