



## **Wisdom for all Time**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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So often circumstances bring us distress and the urge to do whatever we can to fix the problems that are bothersome. We think that if we just try harder or pray more the person, we care about will make better choices. But trying harder and focusing on trouble can steal our health, prevent us from sleeping and not result in what we had hoped for. Throwing money at the problem can just leave us poorer and result in an unending demand for more.

A friend of mine once told me “When we are working harder than the client, we are working too hard”. This applies not just to clients but to people who we think need us. We cannot change other people. Often, we cannot resolve injustices. Sometimes our need to help is stronger than their need to be helped.

It is therefore important that we focus on the things that we can change and that usually means taking care of our physical and mental health rather than letting worry rob us of them.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) was an American Theologian who wrote a prayer for the sermon that he was giving at the Heath Evangelical Union Church in Massachusetts around 1934. Although it was commonly used in different settings throughout the 1930s and 1940s, it was not published until 1951 when it appeared in a magazine column.

Many of us know the short form of the prayer that has been adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs. It is usually recited as three lines. Few, however, know how many versions there are of the prayer and have never even heard the full prayer.

This week, as we stand at the door to a new year, I offer you the three-line version of the Serenity Prayer written by Niebuhr.

God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And wisdom to know the difference.

Serenity is about being calm and untroubled. We can experience this only if we are willing to have good boundaries that allow us to know where we stop, and another person begins. Live and let live. Trying to change another person will not only be fruitless but can be viewed as meddling, controlling or arrogant. Ignoring or not putting any effort into changing and improving ourselves is immaturity. The best results come from daily improvement in our own lives.

My hope is that each of us will cherish the words of the Serenity Prayer and practice them in our lives. If we do this, we will not only be able to enjoy serenity but will make the world just that much better.

Happy New Year, everyone!