

Social Welfare for Older Persons in Biblical Scripture: An Analysis Through a Modern Social Work Lens

Gbeminiyi Mujaheed Adegbola PhD

Department of Sociological Studies

Tai Solarin University of Education

adegbolagm@tasued.edu.ng, 08163881377

&

Professor Olatubosun Tope Omotayo

Department of Adult and Development Education

Tai Solarin University of Education

omotayoot@tasued.edu.ng; 08060486168

Abstract

This article explores the biblical foundation for the social welfare of older persons, drawing exclusively from scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. Through thematic analysis of key passages, the study identifies core principles concerning the dignity, caregiving, justice, and community responsibility owed to the elderly. Scripture presents a holistic model of elder care that includes familial obligation, community-based support, and social justice imperatives. The article examines commandments such as "honor your father and your mother," gleaning laws, prophetic calls to defend widows, and the early church's structured care for ageing widows, revealing a moral framework deeply concerned with the well-being of older adults. Parallels are drawn between these biblical teachings and modern social work values particularly respect for human dignity, intergenerational solidarity, advocacy for vulnerable populations, and inclusion of older persons as active contributors to society. The analysis demonstrates that the Bible not only prescribes compassionate elder care but positions it as a sacred duty and societal cornerstone. These insights provide a theological foundation that can enrich contemporary gerontological practice and inform faith-based approaches to elder welfare in policy and caregiving.

Keywords: Older persons, Social welfare, Biblical scripture, Social work, Elder care.

Introduction

The ethical treatment and care of older persons is a central concern in contemporary social welfare and social work practice. Interestingly, this concern is not new as the Bible, across both the Old and New Testaments, contains numerous teachings on the dignity, care, and justice due to the elderly. In ancient Israel and the early Christian church, there were no formal state pensions or structured social care systems; instead, responsibility for the welfare of older adults rested on families, religious institutions, and the broader community. Biblical scripture reflects a culture that highly valued its elders, viewing longevity as a blessing and expecting society to honor and provide for those of advanced age. As McKinney and Hill (2017) note, biblical perspectives reveal that “honour and care of the elderly is an integral part of the Christian vision of life” (p. 59).

This article explores key biblical passages related to social welfare for older persons and analyzes them thematically through the lens of contemporary social work principles. The themes addressed include the dignity and respect accorded to elders, family responsibility and caregiving for ageing parents, community support systems for the elderly, justice and protection of vulnerable older adults, and the inclusion and participation of elders in society. Each section **will** cite scripture from both the Old and New Testaments, interpret the passages in context, and draw parallels to current social work values and practices.

Practically focusing exclusively on biblical scripture, we aim to understand how care for older persons is both mandated and modeled in Judeo-Christian texts, and how these ancient principles align with or inform today’s approaches to elder care. The analysis **will** demonstrate that many core values in contemporary gerontological social work such as promoting dignity, ensuring social justice for vulnerable elders, strengthening family and community support, and fostering active ageing, strongly resonate with

biblical teachings written millennia ago. This congruence underscores the enduring wisdom of biblical ethics regarding the elderly. We begin with the biblical call to honor the dignity of older persons.

Dignity and Respect for the Elderly in Scripture

One of the most apparent biblical themes regarding older persons is the call to treat them with honor, respect, and dignity. The Bible explicitly commands reverence for the elderly as a demonstration of reverence for God. In the Old Testament, for example, the Law of Moses states: *“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord”* (Leviticus 19:32, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This injunction links respect for older people with piety toward God, implying that honoring the elderly is a sacred duty. The imagery of rising in the presence of the aged suggests a cultural norm of deference, akin to how one might stand for a judge or a king. In other words, the elderly are to be treated with a high degree of esteem. This principle affirms the inherent dignity of older individuals. From a modern social work perspective, this resonates with the core value of respect for the dignity and worth of the person, a foundational principle in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021). Social workers today combat ageism by promoting positive views of ageing and advocating that older client be treated with respect. Biblical law anticipated this value by discouraging disdain or neglect toward the elderly.

Ancient wisdom literature further reinforces the honor due to old age. Proverbs 16:31 declares: *“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness”* (NIV, 2011). In Israelite culture, gray hair, often symbolic of advanced age, was regarded not as a liability, but as a “crown of glory.” Similarly, Proverbs 20:29 states: *“The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old”* (NIV, 2011). These proverbs poetically affirm that long life and the wisdom presumed to come with it are honorable. Rather than glorifying youth and productivity alone, the Bible elevates the dignity and contribution of older adults. This view challenges modern societies, which often prize youth, to also

value the contributions and insights of elders. In contemporary practice, social workers embrace strengths-based approaches with older adults, recognizing their life experience, resilience, and wisdom as assets to families and communities. The biblical exaltation of gray hair as a “crown” parallels this strengths-based model, emphasizing that a person’s worth is often enhanced and not diminished by age.

In the New Testament, the ethos of respect for elders continues within the early Christian community. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy, a young church leader, on how to relate to older congregants: “*Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father... Treat older women as mothers*” (1 Timothy 5:1–2, NIV, 2011). While given in a church leadership context, this guidance reflects a broader principle of treating elders with familial respect and gentleness. Even when correction is necessary, younger persons are instructed to approach older men as they would a father, with humility and deference and to regard older women with the care accorded to one's own mother. Such instructions reinforce the norm of dignity in communication and interaction with elders. This approach aligns closely with contemporary person-centered care, which emphasizes respectful interaction, empowerment, and relational dignity when working with older clients.

Beyond direct commands, Scripture provides narrative examples that highlight respect for the elderly. A poignant instance occurs at the crucifixion of Jesus, where even amid his suffering, he ensures that his mother Mary will be cared for. Observing her and the disciple John, Jesus says, “*Woman, here is your son*,” and to John, “*Here is your mother*” (John 19:26–27, NIV, 2011). From that hour, the disciple took her into his home. In this scene, Jesus honours his mother by entrusting her to a faithful friend, ensuring that Mary will not be left alone or vulnerable in her old age. The implicit message is that older persons deserve care, security, and familial love. Jesus’ action exemplifies the fifth commandment: “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12, NIV, 2011) in practice. For contemporary social workers, this story illustrates the principle of filial responsibility and respect. Across many cultures, caregiving for ageing parents is seen as a moral and sometimes legal duty, and social workers often support families in

fulfilling this obligation. The dignity accorded to Mary reflects a broader biblical ethic in which older women and men are recognized as deserving of honour and protection. Taken together, these scriptures affirm a coherent biblical ethic: to respect, honour, and care for the elderly is a sacred duty, one that aligns with the core social work values of dignity, compassion, and justice.

Family Responsibility and Caregiving for Aged Parents

Biblical scripture places the primary responsibility for the care of older adults on their families, particularly their children. This is most clearly rooted in the Ten Commandments, which enjoin, *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12, New International Version [NIV], 2011). While “honor” certainly includes respect, it also has very practical implications: adult children are expected to support and care for their parents in old age. The promise of longevity attached to this commandment suggests that a society in which the young honor the old is one marked by continuity and stability.

In ancient Israel, there was a strong expectation of reciprocity between generations: just as parents cared for and raised their children, adult children were morally obligated to support their parents as they aged. This reciprocal responsibility is explicitly described in the New Testament: *“If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God”* (1 Timothy 5:4, NIV, 2011). Here, caregiving is framed as a form of repayment, an act of justice and duty as much as one of love. The notion of filial piety is thus deeply rooted in both testaments, establishing a spiritual and ethical foundation for intergenerational care.

The New Testament continues to reinforce this ethic. Paul writes, *“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Timothy 5:8, NIV, 2011). This strong condemnation reflects the seriousness with which the early

Christian community viewed familial caregiving. Failure to support ageing relatives was not only a moral lapse but a spiritual failing. Even non-Christians, the text suggests, understood the inherent duty to care for one's family. In modern social work, this ethic is echoed in the assumption that families are the primary caregivers for older adults. While governments and institutions offer supplemental services, policies often presume that families, when available, will bear much of the financial, emotional, and physical responsibility of elder care (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). Social workers help support these caregivers through counseling, respite services, and practical resources. Paul's writings align with this model, advocating for concrete family involvement in elder support and condemning its absence.

Jesus Christ also upheld the commandment of honoring one's parents, and He criticized those who tried to evade this responsibility. In the Gospel of Mark, He exposes a loophole used by some religious leaders who would declare their wealth "Corban" (dedicated to God) to avoid using it to support their parents. He rebukes them: *"But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'Corban'... then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition"* (Mark 7:10–13, NIV, 2011). By labeling this behaviour as a nullification of God's law, Jesus underscores that caring for ageing parents is not an optional act of generosity but a divine mandate. From a social work perspective, this passage could be seen as a critique of cultural, legal, or religious rationalizations used to justify elder neglect. The principle Jesus affirms is clear: no pretext whatsoever, religious, financial, or otherwise can excuse failure to care for ageing parents.

While family support is prioritized, the early church also created safety nets for elderly individuals who had no relatives. In 1 Timothy 5:16, Paul advises, *"If any believing woman has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need"* (NIV, 2011). The phrase "widows who are really in need" likely

refers to older women without family or social support. Paul's counsel suggests a structured approach: family care first, community care when family is absent. This balance reflects an ordered ethic, where personal responsibility precedes communal obligation. Social workers apply similar logic today, for instance, exploring family-based caregiving options before organizing institutional or state-based services. The concept of prioritizing those "really in need" remains essential in triaging care and allocating limited social resources.

Biblical narratives also provide illustrative examples of familial caregiving. In Genesis 47:11–12, during a time of famine, Joseph by then a high-ranking official in Egypt, provides generously for his father Jacob and extended family, ensuring that Jacob's final years are lived in dignity and comfort. In the Book of Ruth, a striking example of filial commitment is found in Ruth's relationship with her ageing mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth not only returns with Naomi to Bethlehem but works tirelessly to support her. She famously declares: "*Where you go, I will go... your people will be my people and your God my God*" (Ruth 1:16–18, NIV, 2011). Ultimately, Ruth's son Obed becomes Naomi's grandson and caregiver, as the women of the village proclaim that he "*will renew your life and sustain you in your old age*" (Ruth 4:15, NIV, 2011). These stories depict intergenerational solidarity not only as duty but as devotion motivated by love, loyalty, and divine guidance (McKenzie, 1999).

In sum, Scripture strongly promotes family-based caregiving as a cornerstone of social responsibility. This theme is consistent with contemporary social welfare principles that view the family as the primary unit of support in old age. While modern interventions have expanded to include professional and governmental care, the ethical framework provided by the Bible affirms that family caregiving is a foundational and sacred expression of social justice and moral responsibility.

Community and Religious Support Systems for the Elderly

While the family holds primary responsibility for elder care in biblical teaching, the broader community is also called upon to establish support systems especially for those who are widowed, poor, or without family. Ancient Israelite society maintained a form of social welfare embedded in religious law, designed to ensure subsistence for its most vulnerable members. Among the key provisions were the gleaning laws, which required farmers to leave the edges of their fields and any overlooked sheaves for the needy.

“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 24:19, New International Version [NIV], 2011). In this context, “the widow” often referred to older women who lacked male financial support, and therefore stood among society’s most vulnerable.

The placement of widows alongside orphans and foreigners in Israel’s legal codes (Deuteronomy 26:12) indicates that elderly women were viewed as a protected category deserving of ongoing material support. The triennial tithe, for example, was to be shared with *“the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow”* so they might “eat in your towns and be satisfied” (Deuteronomy 26:12, NIV, 2011). From a modern lens, such measures resemble food assistance programs and community food banks designed to meet the nutritional needs of those who are socially or economically isolated. Social work institutions today mirror these ancient structures through food security initiatives, community-based nutrition programs, and faith-based charity services.

In the New Testament, this communal ethos of elder care is further institutionalized. Acts 6:1 records one of the first major administrative challenges of the early church: a dispute over the distribution of food to widows. *“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily*

distribution of food" (Acts 6:1, NIV, 2011). The apostles responded by appointing seven men commonly viewed as the first deacons to manage the food program, ensuring fair and equitable service delivery (Acts 6:2–3). These "widows," likely older women without spousal support, became early beneficiaries of structured church-based care.

The appointment of culturally representative leaders (e.g., Greek-named deacons) to resolve a service equity concern reflects principles found in modern culturally competent social work (McKinney & Hill, 2017). What began as an unmet need within a marginalized group led to a practical, programmatic response that addressed hunger and upheld community cohesion. This biblical narrative parallels the roles that today's religious institutions and nonprofits play in community development particularly as partners with social service agencies addressing elder hunger, poverty, and isolation.

Moreover, the early church established eligibility criteria for continued support. In 1 Timothy 5:9–10, Paul outlines that only widows over sixty years of age, known for good works and without family support, should be "put on the list" for church aid (NIV, 2011). This closely resembles modern public welfare eligibility models that prioritize aid based on need, age, and absence of familial resources. Sixty years of age, in antiquity, marked a significant threshold, as average life expectancy at that time was far lower. Scholars suggest the age qualification reflected an acknowledgment of diminished capacity for employment or remarriage (Tamas et al., 2016). Thus, the church assumed a surrogate family role for older women, offering both sustenance and inclusion.

The Epistle of James adds a theological imperative to such care: "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*" (James 1:27, NIV, 2011). Through elevating care for widows as a measure of authentic religious practice, James underscores a spiritual and moral obligation to care for society's most vulnerable. In social work ethics, similar

emphasis is placed on the notion that how a society treats its elderly and marginalized members is a test of its moral standing.

Acts 4:34–35 further demonstrates a communal pooling of resources: *“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money... and it was distributed to anyone who had need”* (NIV, 2011). Though not limited to older adults, such generosity undoubtedly supported elderly members, especially those widowed or infirm. These texts echo principles found in cooperative housing models, benevolence funds, and mutual aid societies that address elder housing and subsistence in contemporary contexts.

This model of community and religious care for the elderly has had historical resonance. Monasteries, convents, and religious charities throughout Christian history established almshouses and shelters for the elderly poor. Today, many faith-based organizations continue this legacy by operating nursing homes, senior centers, and charitable foundations. Social workers frequently collaborate with these groups to deliver culturally and spiritually appropriate elder care (Knight, 2014).

Importantly, the tone of biblical elder care is not one of reluctant duty, but of compassionate solidarity. Widows in the early church were not passive recipients of aid but were encouraged to remain spiritually active (1 Timothy 5:5). This reflects modern social work’s recognition of older adults as whole persons whose needs include not just material support, but relational, emotional, and spiritual inclusion. Programs such as friendly visiting, intergenerational mentorship, and parish nursing initiatives all echo this holistic approach.

In summary, Scripture presents a proactive, justice-driven vision of community support for the elderly. This tradition finds modern expression in both government programs and the ongoing efforts of community and faith-based organizations to ensure the dignity, welfare, and inclusion of older adults

Justice and Protection for Vulnerable Elders

Beyond the provision of material needs, the Bible emphasizes justice for vulnerable elders and condemns those who exploit or oppress them. Widows often representing older women, are frequently grouped in scripture with marginalized populations such as orphans, foreigners, and the poor, reflecting God's special concern for these groups. In the Mosaic law, God warns: "*Do not mistreat or oppress a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry*" (Exodus 22:22–23, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This strong statement includes divine consequences for those who abuse or neglect the defenseless. Similarly, a curse pronounced at Mount Ebal declares: "*Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow*" (Deuteronomy 27:19, NIV, 2011). These texts portray elderly widows as legally protected persons under divine law, with community members morally and spiritually accountable for ensuring their welfare.

From a modern social work perspective, these verses highlight that elder care is not merely a charitable act but a matter of justice. Contemporary advocacy efforts against elder abuse, healthcare discrimination, or age-related poverty echo these concerns. Social work upholds that safeguarding older adult, particularly those who are isolated or disabled, is not an act of pity but a commitment to their rights and dignity (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). The Bible's insistence on justice for widows validates this position, asserting that the mistreatment of elderly persons is both a moral and societal failure.

The biblical prophets frequently call for justice in defense of the vulnerable. Isaiah urges: "*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow*" (Isaiah 1:17, NIV, 2011). The metaphor of "pleading the case" evokes legal advocacy, suggesting that believers should serve as defenders for those unable to represent themselves which is an image consistent with the modern roles of elder rights attorneys, adult protective service agents, and social

workers advocating on behalf of older adults. In ancient Israel and many contemporary societies, elderly widows often faced barriers to property ownership, inheritance rights, or legal representation. The prophetic demand for justice echoes the mission of modern advocates working to prevent elder exploitation and to protect their autonomy and access to justice.

Jesus continues this theme in the New Testament, delivering sharp rebukes to religious leaders who prey on the vulnerable. In Luke 20:47, He condemns those who “*devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers*,” promising they will be “punished most severely” (NIV, 2011; cf. Mark 12:40). This statement suggests financial abuse such as taking advantage of widows, perhaps through coercion, fraud, or manipulation under the guise of religious authority. In today’s terms, this resembles financial elder abuse, where individuals in trusted positions exploit an older adult’s resources. Such scenarios are the subject of intense scrutiny in contemporary elder law and protective services, and Jesus’ harsh warning affirms the seriousness of such offenses.

James, too, raises the issue of withheld wages and oppression in a broader justice context: “*The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you*” (James 5:4, NIV, 2011). Though focused on laborers, the sentiment parallels the biblical indictment of those who defraud widows and orphans. As in Malachi 3:5, where God promises to judge those who “oppress the widows and the fatherless,” the consistent message is that justice for the vulnerable, including the elderly, is central to God’s moral order.

Psalm 68:5 refers to God as a “*father to the fatherless and a defender of widows*” (NIV, 2011), affirming divine identification with those who lack human protection. In modern terms, this can be understood as a theological foundation for creating systems that defend older persons’ rights and welfare through elder law protections, secure pension systems, and anti-discrimination statutes. Tamas et al. (2016) interpret

this as a divine endorsement of ontological responsibility for elder welfare, extending beyond individual virtue to collective justice.

Narrative examples further illustrate community-based protection for the elderly. In the Book of Ruth, Boaz publicly redeems Naomi's land at the city gate (Ruth 4:9–10), restoring her financial security and preserving her late husband's lineage. This legal action carried out in the communal legal space ensured that Naomi, an elderly widow, would not be left destitute. Similarly, the appointment of deacons in Acts 6 to resolve distribution disparities between Hellenistic and Hebraic widows demonstrates the early church's commitment to procedural fairness and equity in community services.

From these accounts, a robust biblical ethic emerges: justice for older persons is a collective and moral responsibility. It is not left to private discretion but is a public duty with spiritual consequences. This aligns with modern macro-level social work practices, including elder rights education, policy advocacy, and anti-ageism efforts. Just as biblical prophets and Jesus demanded fairness and condemned exploitation, social workers today continue to advocate for systems that ensure protection, dignity, and justice for all older adults.

Inclusion, Contribution, and Dignity in Later Life

A comprehensive biblical view of the elderly extends beyond seeing them as passive recipients of care; it also emphasizes their ongoing value, participation, and contributions to the community. This outlook resonates with modern gerontological principles such as “active ageing” and “productive ageing,” which highlight social inclusion, engagement, and the empowerment of seniors. The Bible reflects this framework by presenting older individuals as reservoirs of wisdom, spiritual mentors, and moral exemplars.

Job 12:12 affirms the value of lived experience: “*Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long-life bring understanding?*” (New International Version [NIV], 2011). Biblical elders often served as leaders and counselors. The term “elders of Israel,” referring to literal older men entrusted with community decisions, appears frequently throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 3:16; Deuteronomy 27:1). In the New Testament, “elders” (Greek: presbyteroi) functioned as both spiritual and administrative leaders in early Christian communities (Acts 14:23). Though it evolved into a formal title, the term originally connoted maturity and moral authority associated with age. This structure affirms the active role of elders in communal governance and spiritual guidance, an ideal that aligns with contemporary social work strategies that promote elder leadership through senior advisory councils, mentoring roles, and volunteerism (Knight, 2014).

In Titus 2:2–5, Paul articulates the mentoring responsibilities of older adults: “*Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent... then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children...*” (NIV, 2011). These verses assign older men and women clear mentoring and teaching roles, fostering moral development in the younger generation. The intergenerational relationships envisioned here mirror Erikson’s psychosocial stage of “generativity versus stagnation,” in which fulfillment in later life is achieved by guiding the next generation (Erikson, 1982). In social work, intergenerational mentorship programs and legacy-sharing initiatives similarly serve to strengthen the well-being and self-worth of elders while enriching youth with life-tested insights.

Scripture further emphasizes that old age is a period of ongoing purpose and vitality. Psalm 92:14 affirms: “*They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green*” (NIV, 2011). The imagery of a flourishing tree suggests continued relevance and productivity, reinforcing the belief that ageing is not synonymous with decline. Psalm 71:18 expresses a similar desire: “*Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.*” This prayer reflects the spiritual

vocation of the elderly to instruct, testify, and inspire. Contemporary gerontological practices such as life review therapy, digital storytelling, and legacy-building echo this biblical view by affirming that ageing adults have valuable knowledge and spiritual insight to pass on (Tamas et al., 2016).

Narratives throughout Scripture reinforce the active participation of older adults. Moses was 80 when he led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 7:7), and Anna, the prophetess in Luke 2:36–38, served as a spiritual witness in the temple despite her advanced age. In 1 Peter 5:5, the younger are exhorted to submit to their elders, indicating mutual respect and intergenerational balance. In many modern cultures, however, older adults are often socially segregated or institutionalized. The early church, by contrast, operated as an intergenerational family, where older and younger believers worshipped and shared meals together (Acts 2:42–47). This model supports today's calls for "ageing in place," community integration, and intergenerational community centers that resist the isolation of elders.

Respect for elders also includes patience and accommodation for their limitations. Leviticus 19:32, which commands believers to "stand up in the presence of the aged," may also suggest practical accommodations such as giving space, showing deference, or assisting frail elders. Paul advises Timothy: "*Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father*" (1 Timothy 5:1, NIV, 2011), highlighting the need for patience, gentleness, and cultural humility. This anticipates modern person-centered care and trauma-informed practice, which emphasize the importance of respectful engagement and autonomy for older clients.

A poignant example of respecting elder autonomy occurs in 2 Samuel 19:33–37, where Barzillai, an 80-year-old man, respectfully declines King David's invitation to live in royal luxury. Citing his age and desire to remain in his hometown, Barzillai's wishes are honored without coercion. This narrative affirms the elder's right to self-determination, a concept central to social work ethics (NASW, 2021). The principle

remains: capable older adults must be consulted about their preferences and supported in living independently as long as possible.

In conclusion, the Bible does not present older persons as a burden to society, but as dignified and indispensable members of the community. They are to be included, empowered, and valued for their spiritual depth, life experience, and wisdom. This scriptural ethic aligns with strengths-based social work models, where emphasis is placed not only on addressing deficits, but also on enabling elders to thrive. Contemporary eldercare policies and social work interventions that promote empowerment, intergenerational solidarity, and purposeful ageing are rooted in this timeless biblical vision of inclusion and reverence for older adults.

Conclusion

From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical vision for the care of older persons is clear, consistent, and remarkably comprehensive. The scriptures examined reveal a multifaceted framework for elder welfare that aligns closely with modern social work principles. The Bible calls for: reverence and dignity toward the aged (combating ageism and affirming each person's intrinsic value as an image-bearer of God); family responsibility for caregiving (promoting intergenerational reciprocity and emotional bonds within the household); community and faith-based support systems (ensuring that no elder is neglected, even in the absence of family); justice and protection for vulnerable elders (advocating for the defense of rights and condemnation of abuse); and purposeful inclusion of the elderly (recognizing their wisdom and encouraging their ongoing contributions to community life).

These mandates are not only spiritually grounded but also offer practical insights. Societies that implement such principles create environments where older adults are valued, supported, and

empowered. The commandment to “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12, New International Version [NIV], 2011) finds modern parallels in filial responsibility laws and ethical expectations for family caregiving. Biblical injunctions to “*plead the case of the widow*” (Isaiah 1:17, NIV, 2011) are echoed in elder abuse prevention laws, social work advocacy, and legal protections for impoverished seniors. The early church’s systematic care for widows through needs assessments, distribution of food, and enrollment for ongoing support, mirrors principles of case management and targeted social service provision. Similarly, the inclusion of elders in communal leadership and teaching (Titus 2:2–5; Psalm 71:18) supports initiatives that engage older adults through volunteerism, mentorship, and public service.

Viewed through a biblical lens, elder care is not merely a matter of practicality or economics, it is a moral and spiritual imperative. James 1:27 declares that “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.*” This positions elder care as a form of sacred responsibility. To neglect or exploit an older person is, biblically speaking, a grave injustice; to care for them is to honor God (McKinney & Hill, 2017). Faith-based practitioners in social work may find renewed purpose in this scriptural foundation, while those in secular settings can still draw upon the Bible’s enduring ethical insight into human dignity, equity, and compassion.

Practically, these biblical values can enrich and strengthen social work interventions. Faith communities can revitalize their historical role in elder care by partnering with social agencies, offering holistic support systems, and advocating for elder justice. Public policy rooted in the biblical concern for the vulnerable may prioritize support for caregivers, secure pensions, equitable healthcare, and robust elder protection laws. Moreover, the emphasis on family and community in scripture suggests that long-term solutions should avoid isolating or institutionalizing the elderly when alternative, community-rooted models exist.

In conclusion, biblical teachings and modern social work values converge around a shared vision: a society in which elders are protected, honored, and integrated. Both perspectives advocate for systems where older persons experience dignity, justice, and meaningful engagement. As societies face an unprecedented demographic shift toward ageing populations, the biblical vision becomes increasingly relevant. It calls upon families, communities, and leaders to work collaboratively, just as social workers do in multidisciplinary teams, to secure the welfare of older generations.

This ethic is not merely historical; it is a future-oriented call to action. Proverbs 30:17 warns of disgrace for those who mock their elders, while Luke 6:38 reminds us, *“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* The moral is simple: a society that honors its elders ensures its own longevity and prosperity. In embracing the biblical call to care for the aged, we affirm not only faith and tradition, but the essence of human solidarity and social justice which is a legacy worth preserving for generations to come.

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