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## The Serenity Prayer (Part 1 of 3): Working toward Acceptance

*A Commentary by Jason Curry*



The Reverend Dr. Jason Richard Curry is Dean of the Fisk Memorial Chapel at Fisk University. He can be reached at [jecurry@fisk.edu](mailto:jecurry@fisk.edu) or [www.fiskmemorialchapel.com](http://www.fiskmemorialchapel.com).

I was introduced to the eloquence of the Serenity Prayer approximately ten years ago while serving as a counselor in a detoxification unit. The clients and I often brought educational materials to the group sessions, and, one day, a resident presented the Serenity Prayer for discussion. The words of the Serenity Prayer are as follows: "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." The Serenity Prayer is a popular and meaningful prayer among people who are in recovery from alcohol and other drugs, but it has also proven to be invaluable to people who are facing the intense, unrelenting and confusing challenges of life on a daily basis. Like many young preachers, I was wrestling with my call to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since many of the minister's that I admired were persecuted, killed or alienated, I examined my potential

career with excitement as well as with Soren Kierkegaard's "fear and trembling." When I finally accepted the fact that God had called me into the ministry and, accepted the fact that I was going into the ministry, I began to experience the peace or serenity that is spoken about in the prayer. My year-long process of working toward acceptance was facilitated by the words of a spiritual: "Done made my vow to the Lord, and I'm never going to turn back. I will go, I shall go to see what the end will be."

The Serenity Prayer was written by, or at least credited to, a preacher and theologian named Reinhold Niebuhr. The first part of his prayer maintains that we will not enjoy a certain peace or serenity unless we learn how to accept the things we "cannot change." We are not able to change the mistakes that we've made in our past. Sometimes we are not able to change the decisions made by our

children, our parents, our brother and sisters, significant others, co-workers, friends or former friends. However, when we begin the difficult work of accepting the fact that 1) we are not perfect, 2) the people around us are not perfect, 3) the people in our past were not perfect, 4) we still serve a loving, healing and forgiving God, and 5) through God we have a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7), then we have truly begun to receive the serenity that God has in store for us. Working on accepting some of the things of the past can be challenging, but our strength to overcome remains rooted in the Paul's conviction: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)." Amen.