

# The Serenity Prayer



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A landmark work on the liberal ideals of the progressive American tradition, reaffirming their relevance for today: "A major contribution to the intellectual history of modernity."—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. In 1943, the renowned theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote a prayer for a church service in a New England village. Its appeal for grace, courage, and wisdom soon became famous the world over. Here, Elisabeth Sifton, Niebuhr's daughter, reclaims the true history of the Serenity Prayer and, in a poignant narrative, tells of efforts made by the brave men and women who, like Niebuhr, devoted their lives to the causes of social justice, racial equality, and religious freedom in a world spiraling into and out of economic depression and war. Recalling her father's efforts to warn the clergy of the dangers of fascism, and of America's own social and spiritual crises, Sifton reminds us of what is possible when liberal, open-minded leaders—not zealous fundamentalists or hawkish plutocrats—shape the conscience of the nation. The Serenity Prayer is itself a meditation on the power of prayer in morally compromised, unstable times. A New York Times Notable Book.

"Crossing all religious boundaries, the Serenity Prayer may be the best-loved prayer in America. Why? Elisabeth Sifton gives the best answer by remembering a life lived in fidelity to the prayer, the life of her father, the prayer's author, Reinhold Niebuhr.

Candidly observed, brimful of energy and wit, this memoir becomes by its end a moving meditation on the dark heart of the twentieth century."—Jack Miles, author of Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God "Elisabeth Sifton's The Serenity Prayer is in part a memoir of her father, Reinhold Niebuhr, in part a meditation on the dilemmas of religious faith in the contemporary world. Beautifully written, filled with perceptive insights and wry humor, it is a major contribution to the intellectual history of modernity."—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. The Serenity Prayer is an adventure in applied theology, family history, and a nation's search for meaning. Elisabeth Sifton has written a deeply engaging work of memory and imagination; a broadside critique of politics and religion worthy of the name Niebuhr; a humane meditation on prayer; memoir at its best; nothing less than literature."—James Carroll "It is forbidden to look back with envy upon Reinhold Niebuhr and the other religious intellectuals brought back to life so vividly in Elisabeth Sifton's important book, because the world in which they lived was truly dark. But they were, truly, children of light. In their intrepid, learned, and humane minds, ideas of God mingled naturally with ideas of liberalism: so how can one not read The Serenity Prayer without a tremor of nostalgia? Here are men and women praying as intelligently as they were thinking and thinking as intensely as they were praying. Sifton's steadfast and affecting memoir leaves me not just admiring her father, it leaves me also loving him."—Leon Wieselthier "[An] ebullient and shrewd meditation on faith and social action....A peaceable state of mind simply accompanies the reader as he ends this effortlessly elegant, uniformly sensible paean to the human faith that Sifton inherited."—Carlin Romano, Philadelphia Inquirer "A timely reminder of the wealth and diversity of the American religious tradition."—Walter Russell Mead, Foreign Affairs 12 illustrations

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