

CRADLE OF GRACE

A THEOLOGY OF AGE REGRESSION



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Cradle of Grace A Theology of Age Regression

by

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Order of Franciscan Clareans



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Introduction: Becoming Small Again

They told us to grow up. To toughen. To hide our softness, our neediness, our tender cries. Even the Church often joined the chorus, praising strength, maturity, and independence as signs of spiritual growth. But what if holiness is sometimes found in becoming small again?

Cradle of Grace is a theology of sacred littleness. It is a love letter to the child within—the one who longs to be held, to feel safe, to rest without performance. It is for those who regress not out of immaturity, but out of longing: longing for comfort, for healing, for protection, for joy. And for some of us, age regression is not a choice—it is a response to trauma, a doorway to healing, a sanctuary the world cannot touch.

In these pages, I write as a theologian, a caregiver, and an age regressor myself. I know what it is to feel small in a world that demands adulthood. I know what it is to need lullabies and stuffies and the gentle rhythm of a rocking chair. I know what it is to find God not in the clouds, but in the nursery. In the arms of the Divine Caregiver.

Age regression has been pathologized, ridiculed, misunderstood. But I believe—in my bones and my blankie—that age regression can be sacred. That it is not shameful to want to be little. That there is nothing wrong with needing to be cared for. That regression can be a form of prayer, a return to the arms of God, a spiritual practice of resting in belovedness.

This book is not about fixing people who regress. It is about honoring them. It is not about defending a lifestyle. It is about lifting up a way of being that our culture—especially our

churches—often silences. It is about reclaiming childlikeness as a holy path. Not childishness, but childlikeness. Vulnerability. Wonder. Trust. Need.

We will look at Scripture. At Jesus' words about becoming like children. At God's maternal and paternal tenderness. At David's dance and Isaiah's cradle-song. We will sit with trauma and healing, queerness and embodiment, ritual and resistance. We will cry and color and remember that being little is not something to outgrow. It is something to return to, again and again.

This is not a book of rules. It is a book of grace. If you are a regressor, or love someone who is, this book is for you. If you are curious, skeptical, or confused, it is for you too. All I ask is that you come with an open heart. Maybe even a teddy bear.

Because sometimes, to find our deepest healing, we must first crawl back into the crib of God.

Welcome to the cradle.

Chapter 1: "Unless You Become Like Little Children"

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

—Matthew 18:3 (NRSVue)

Jesus didn't say, "Grow up."
He said, "Become like children."

What a radical thing for the Son of God to say to grown men. In a society that valued power, status, and control—just like ours—Jesus lifted up the child as the model of what it means to belong in the Kingdom of Heaven. And not just any child: a small one. A dependent one. A socially insignificant one.

In the Gospels, this moment comes as the disciples are arguing about greatness. Who is the most important? Who will sit where? Who will lead? Jesus responds not with a lecture on hierarchy, but with a demonstration. He calls over a little child—not to be patted on the head, but to be *emulated*. He says, "Unless you turn around and become like this child, you can't even *enter* the Kingdom."

It's not just about humility. It's about vulnerability. It's about trust. It's about need. It's about the parts of ourselves we're taught to suppress in adulthood: our dependence, our desire for love, our need to be cared for. And for age regressors, these qualities don't need to be faked—they emerge naturally. When we regress, we become like children. Emotionally. Behaviorally. Spiritually.

Childlike, Not Childish

It's important to distinguish between being childlike and being childish. The latter refers to self-centeredness, tantrums, or irresponsibility. But Jesus isn't asking us to be bratty. He's asking us to be soft.

Children are trusting, open, in awe of the world. They ask for help. They cry when they're hurt. They cuddle when they're scared. They play, they imagine, they rest. They don't earn their value—they receive it. For regressors, this is the heart of the experience: returning to a place where we are safe enough to let go of performance and receive care.

Jesus doesn't shame childlike need. He blesses it.

Becoming Little on Purpose

In some Christian traditions, spiritual “maturity” is defined by stoicism, control, or intellectual rigor. But the Gospel turns this on its head. Spiritual maturity, according to Jesus, might just look like pacifiers and plushies. Like giggles and safety. Like finding joy in a coloring book instead of a paycheck.

Age regression is a kind of sacred reversal. It is *turning around*—the very Greek word used in Matthew 18:3 is “στραφήτε” (straphete), meaning to change direction, to shift orientation. Regression is not a detour from spiritual growth. It can *be* spiritual growth. A reorientation toward grace.

In a world that demands performance, regression allows us to be. In a society that punishes softness, regression reclaims it as holy. In churches that praise strength, regression reveals the divine in need.

The Kingdom Belongs to Littles

Jesus goes even further in Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17, saying, “*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.*” Not just childlike. *As a child.* Not with pride or propriety—but with open arms, teary eyes, and empty hands.

This is good news for regressors. The Kingdom of God is not a prize for the well-adjusted. It is a playground for the beloved. It is not built on maturity, but mercy. Not stoicism, but snuggling. Not self-sufficiency, but being held.

When we regress, we enact this truth. We crawl into the Divine Parent's lap. We suck our thumbs and whisper, “Abba, hold me.” We aren't excluded from holiness. We *embody* it.



Reflection Prompt

- When do you feel most like a little child? In joy? In fear? In need?

- How have you been taught to hide your need for care?
 - Imagine Jesus picking you up and blessing you, just as he did that child. What would he say to your little self?
-

Prayer for the Little Ones

Jesus,
You called the children close.
You blessed them in their littleness.
You told the strong to become soft,
And the powerful to become playful.
Hold us in your arms when we regress.
Let us find safety in your lap,
Joy in your presence,
And rest in your love.
Teach us that we are enough
Even when we are small.
Especially when we are small.
Amen.

Chapter 2: The God Who Carries Us

*“Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from your birth,
carried from the womb;
even to your old age I am the same,
even when you turn gray I will carry you.”*
—Isaiah 46:3–4 (NRSVue)

Long before you could walk, God was carrying you.

The Bible overflows with maternal and paternal imagery. God is not a distant observer but a nurturing Parent who holds, cradles, feeds, and comforts. In a world where adulthood is often equated with independence, Scripture reminds us: holiness is sometimes found in dependence.

For age regressors—especially those who experience involuntary regression—this image is more than metaphor. It’s a lifeline. When our inner child surfaces, when we feel fragile or afraid, the image of God carrying us is not childish. It is sacred. And it’s biblical.

God the Caregiver

We see this image in Hosea 11, where God remembers parenting Israel as a toddler:

“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms.”

The Divine is not a taskmaster but a caregiver. Tender. Present. Full of compassion for the small and struggling.

We see it again in Deuteronomy 1:31:

“The Lord your God carried you, as one carries a child.”

This is not the God of harsh rules and cold theology. This is the God of lullabies. The God who wipes tears and changes diapers. The God who doesn’t demand you act tough—but draws you close when you fall apart.

When we regress, whether by trauma or choice, we can return to this divine embrace. Not with shame—but with sacred trust.

Carried From the Womb

Isaiah 46 says God has carried us “from the womb”—from our very beginnings—and will continue to carry us “even to your old age.” Our littleness is not a phase to outgrow. It’s a truth to return to.

God does not stop being our Parent just because we age. God’s love is cradle-to-grave. And for regressors, this is especially comforting. Many of us carry wounds from childhood—neglect, abuse, misunderstanding. To be told that God still wants to carry us, still sees the child in us, still holds us when we fall apart... that is healing.

Regression becomes, then, a return to the womb of God. A sacred softening. A way of saying: *I trust You to hold me when I can’t hold myself.*

Who Carries Whom?

In many religious spaces, people are expected to carry God’s message, God’s will, God’s Church. But Scripture flips the image: *God carries us*. We are not beasts of burden in God’s service. We are beloved babes in God’s arms.

This is especially powerful for disabled, neurodivergent, or traumatized regressors. When the world says, “You’re too much,” or “You’re not functioning,” God says, “I’ve got you.”

You don’t have to earn being held. You just have to be.



Reflection Prompt

- What does it mean to you to imagine God as someone who carries you?

- How does your understanding of God change when you picture Them feeding, dressing, or soothing you like a caregiver?
 - Can you recall a time when you needed to be carried—emotionally, spiritually, physically?
-

Prayer to the God Who Carries

Mama God, Daddy God,
You lift me when I fall.
You cradle me when I cry.
You carry me when I am too small to walk.
Thank You for never growing tired of my need.
Thank You for holding the parts of me
that still need lullabies and stuffies.
Teach me to trust Your arms,
to rest without guilt,
to receive Your love when I regress.
Carry me today, and always.
Amen.

Chapter 3: King David Dances in His Linen Ephod

“David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.”
—2 Samuel 6:14 (NRSVue)

There is a sacred foolishness in the presence of God.

King David—warrior, poet, king—stripped down to his linen ephod, a garment resembling an underdress or simple apron, and danced wildly before the ark of the covenant. He didn't perform as a monarch. He didn't posture for approval. He regressed into joy.

What would it mean to reclaim our own dances?

To cast off the stiff garments of adulthood and social expectation and twirl, spin, giggle, play—in our most emotionally authentic, uninhibited, and childlike selves?

Shame and Freedom

David's wife, Michal, watched his dance with contempt. She saw his vulnerability, his regression to something soft and foolish, and she was ashamed of him.

But David wasn't ashamed. He replies, "I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes" (2 Samuel 6:22). In other words: *I'm not done being ridiculous for God. In fact, I'm just getting started.*

Age regression, especially when expressed outwardly, is often met with judgment. We're told it's "cringe," "weird," "childish." But the God who celebrated David's dance celebrates our freedom too. When we regress into silliness, comfort, or softness, we resist the forces that tell us to stay rigid and respectable.

Regression is not regression into sin. It is regression into trust.

Dancing in Littleness

David's dance wasn't carefully choreographed—it was wild, spontaneous, messy. It wasn't about impressing others. It was about being fully embodied before God. Age regression can be like that. When we regress, we often enter a space beyond performance—where crying is honest, cuddling is sacred, and joy is unfiltered.

In that state, we aren't lesser. We are *closer*—to ourselves, to God, to the child within.

There is no liturgical requirement for this. You don't need to justify it with theology. But here's the grace: you *can*. The God of David is the God of regressors. The God who delights in dance also delights in regression.

Neurodiversity and Holy Joy

Some people—especially neurodivergent people—experience regression more naturally, more frequently, or more visibly. And yet, much of religious tradition has been structured around neurotypical expectations: sit still, listen quietly, act mature. But David didn't sit still. He danced. He praised. He moved his body freely in joy.

Age regression may be a form of neurodiverse prayer. Repetitive motion, self-soothing behavior, or baby talk might not be signs of spiritual immaturity—they may be signs of spiritual *aliveness*. David's dance, after all, was *before the Lord*. His movements were holy.



Reflection Prompt

- When have you felt free to express unfiltered joy? Did you feel safe?
 - Have you ever stopped yourself from playing or being silly because of fear or shame?
 - Imagine God watching you dance, regress, or play with delight. What does Their face look like?
-

Prayer for Freedom to Dance

God of joy,
You did not scold David for dancing.
You did not shame his body or his wild delight.
You welcomed his regression into holy joy.
Let me move with that same freedom.
Let me feel safe enough to regress,
To laugh, to play, to be seen as soft and still beloved.
When the world mocks me, cradle me in kindness.
When I dance in my little space, dance with me.
Amen.

Chapter 4: Trauma, Healing, and the Regressed Soul

“He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.”
—Psalm 147:3 (NRSVue)

There are moments when we don’t just feel small—we *become* small.

Not by choice, but by trauma. Not as play, but as protection. Our bodies remember things our minds have tried to forget. And sometimes, in the face of fear, pain, or overwhelm, we slip into littleness—not to escape, but to survive.

This is involuntary age regression. And it is not a failure. It is a brilliant, embodied act of resistance. It is your nervous system crying out for safety, your inner child stepping in to say: *It’s too much, and I need help.*

And God is listening.

The Wisdom of the Inner Child

Modern trauma studies—through the work of thinkers like **Judith Herman**, **Bessel van der Kolk**, and **Gabor Maté**—have shown us that trauma lives in the body. It doesn’t just cause memories; it causes *responses*. Fight, flight, freeze... and sometimes, regression.

Involuntary regression might look like curling up in a ball, speaking in a softer voice, clinging to a stuffed animal, or suddenly craving nurture, structure, or gentle touch. In some traditions, these responses have been pathologized. But from a trauma-informed spiritual perspective, they are signals. Cries. Invitations to care.

Age regression, in this light, is not something to fix—it’s something to *honor*.

And in a sacred way, it brings us into communion with the God who already holds the hurting child within.

God and the Fragmented Self

Trauma often fragments us. Parts of us get stuck in past pain—especially if that pain came when we were young. These younger parts are not immature—they are *wounded*. They are frozen in the moment when nurture was needed but absent. When safety was violated. When needs were unmet.

The Good News is this: **God doesn't just love your adult self. God loves every fragmented, hurting, regressed piece of you.**

Jesus does not require you to be whole before He comes to you. In fact, in Luke 4:18, He declares:

"He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted..."

He doesn't say: fix yourself, then I'll come.

He says: *I've come because you are broken. I will sit with you in the pieces.*

God is not waiting for your "big self" to show up. God is already holding your little one.

Safe Enough to Soften

In trauma healing, safety is the foundation. Involuntary regression often signals that someone does *not* feel safe. But healing comes when someone finally *can*. The regressed soul does not need fixing. It needs *holding*.

God offers that safety.

As Psalm 34:18 says,

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit."

That means the God of the universe is right there with you—when you're small, scared, triggered, or curled up in a ball. Not judging. Not rushing you to grow up. Just *being* there. Near. Gentle. Present.

You don't have to become "big" to be worthy. You just have to breathe. And let God breathe with you.



Reflection Prompt

- What parts of your life or past have caused you to regress?
- What do your regressed parts need to feel safe and loved?

- Imagine God kneeling down, making eye contact with your little self, and whispering: *You're safe now.* What does that feel like?
-

Prayer for the Regressed Soul

Loving God,
You see the small one in me.
The scared one.
The one who hides under blankets and behind silence.
You do not rush me to be strong.
You do not shame me when I slip into littleness.
You stay with me.
You hold the broken pieces.
You rock me in Your arms and hum a lullaby
Only my soul can hear.
Thank You for not needing me to be “big” to be beloved.
I am Yours—regressed, healing, whole.
Amen.

Chapter 5: The Sacred Little Self

“For it is God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

—2 Corinthians 4:6–7 (NRSVue)

You are sacred—even when you're small.
Especially when you're small.

The world tells us we must be productive to be valuable, independent to be respected, and stoic to be spiritual. But God has never measured worth by power. From clay jars to mustard seeds, from babies in mangers to crucified prophets, the divine story always unfolds in fragility.

So when you regress—when you feel tiny, helpless, soft—remember this: *You are still holy.* Not in spite of your littleness, but *through it.*

The Image of God and the Inner Child

Christian theology teaches that we are made in the *imago Dei*, the image of God. But what does that mean for those of us who regress into childlike states? What if the sacred image isn't just

reflected in strength or intellect—but also in need, in gentleness, in the deep yearning to be held?

The sacred little self is not a mask. It's not something we become. It's something we *remember*. It's a truth too often buried under the rubble of survival.

You are not less spiritual when you regress. You are closer to the source. You are returning to the truth that you are loved not for what you do, but for *who you are*.

Undoing the Lies of Adulthood

Adulthood—especially under capitalism and patriarchy—teaches us that:

- Needing help is weakness.
- Expressing emotion is immaturity.
- Dependence is dangerous.
- Play is pointless.

These are lies.

The Gospel undoes them at every turn:

- Jesus wept.
- Jesus napped.
- Jesus received care from women, from friends, even from angels.
- Jesus played with children, told stories, and invited us into joy.

Age regression is not a refusal to grow. It is a holy protest against the myth that growth means losing softness.

Your little self is not a failure of adulthood. It is a glimpse into the divine.

The Treasure in the Jar

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians remind us: we are fragile vessels. But that fragility *contains* the treasure. Our little selves—emotional, dependent, giggly, scared—are not obstacles to spirituality. They are the jars in which grace is carried.

Regression reminds us that we are not God. We are not expected to hold everything together. We are allowed to fall apart. And in doing so, we invite Love to hold *us*.

To be small, to regress, is not to lose God. It is to discover God already on the floor with us, playing with blocks and wiping our tears.

Reflection Prompt

- What would change if you believed your regressed self was sacred?
 - How have you been taught to associate holiness with adulthood, discipline, or control?
 - What if God was most delighted in the softest version of you?
-

Prayer for the Sacred Little Self

Tender God,
You made me in Your image—
Even the little me.
Even the soft, scared, giggly, needy parts.
You don't despise my dependence.
You delight in it.
You call my softness holy.
You see my regression not as a disorder
But as a doorway to deeper love.
Help me honor the sacred little self inside.
Help me love them as You do.
Amen.

Chapter 6: Age Regression and Queer Theology

*“The Spirit blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.
So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*
—John 3:8 (NRSVue)

Age regression is queer.

Not because it's about sexuality—though for some it may intersect with that—but because it defies the tidy categories our society tries to impose. It is countercultural, non-normative, liminal. It embraces fluidity, vulnerability, softness, and need in a world that demands performance, control, and rigid identity.

It says: You don't have to be what they told you to be. You can be little. You can be tender. You can be exactly what your soul needs, and still be loved by God.

That's queer theology at its heart: the reclamation of our bodies, our experiences, and our sacred weirdness as beloved.

Queering Adulthood

Queer theology challenges systems that oppress and marginalize people based on sex, gender, and normativity. But it also questions cultural values like:

- What does it mean to be "grown-up"?
- Who decides what is mature, appropriate, or acceptable?
- Why is softness seen as weakness?

Age regression queers adulthood itself. It asks: What if I don't want to be hardened by trauma? What if I *need* to regress to stay alive? What if I'm reclaiming the childhood I never got? What if my regression is a sacred act of resistance?

In a culture that tells us to climb ladders, age regressors often crawl back down to the floor—and there, they find God fingerpainting with them.

The Radical Freedom of Fluidity

Queer theology, drawing from thinkers like **Patrick Cheng**, **Marcella Althaus-Reid**, and **Virginia Ramey Mollenkott**, celebrates fluid identities. We are not bound to binaries—male/female, saved/damned, child/adult. We are expansive. Transitional. Sacred in motion.

Age regression affirms this. One can be both child and adult. Regressed and wise. Needy and powerful. You don't have to choose. You don't have to justify.

To be fluid is to reflect the Spirit—the Breath of God that moves where it wills, without asking permission.

Regression, like queerness, breaks the mold. And in doing so, it creates space for grace.

The Queer Jesus and the Regressed Soul

Jesus was a radical boundary-breaker. He touched the untouchable. He honored women and children. He spoke in riddles and stories. He wept publicly. He played with children and told his followers to *become like them*.

This is not a stoic savior. This is a *queer Jesus*. A Jesus who embraced emotional complexity, sacred play, chosen family, and softness as holiness. A Jesus who—when exhausted—curled up and slept on a boat. A Jesus who let a woman pour perfume on his feet and wipe it with her hair.

For regressors, this Jesus is familiar. He is gentle. He doesn't ask us to fit in. He simply says, *Come to Me, all you who are weary... and I will give you rest*.

That is queer. That is holy.

That is regression as prayer.

Reflection Prompt

- How has your experience of regression challenged social norms or expectations?
 - In what ways does your regression feel liberating or queer?
 - What if Jesus was proud of you for being “weird,” soft, or different?
-

Prayer for the Queer and Regressed

Spirit of Sacred Fluidity,
You move where You will—
In the giggle of a regressor,
In the stillness of a blankie,
In the courage it takes to be soft
In a hard world.
Thank You for making me different.
Thank You for loving my little self,
Even when others don’t understand.
Help me embrace my queer journey—
Not as broken, but as blessed.
Not as shameful, but as sacred.
Amen.

Chapter 7: Ministry of Holding Space

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly...”

—Romans 12:15–16 (NRSVue)

There is a holy ministry not in preaching or performing, but in simply **being** present. Holding space. Making room for others to be fully themselves—especially when they are small, vulnerable, and regressed.

For many age regressors, spiritual or emotional regression is a deeply intimate experience. It requires safety. And that safety is often found not in isolation, but in *relationship*. In the presence of someone who will not shame us, fix us, or rush us—but simply **stay**.

This is the ministry of holding space: not doing something to a person, but doing something **with** them. Witnessing. Welcoming. Making room.

What It Means to Hold Space

Holding space means offering someone the grace to exist without judgment. It's sacred hospitality. It's like saying:

- "You can be small here."
- "You don't have to explain."
- "I'm not going to fix you. I'm going to be with you."

This is especially important for regressors who fear rejection or misunderstanding. Many have experienced ridicule, abandonment, or spiritual abuse. To have someone say, "I see your little self, and I still love you," is revolutionary.

That's pastoral care at its most tender. That's Christlike accompaniment.

Jesus as a Space-Holder

Jesus was a master at holding space. He let Mary sit at his feet without scolding. He welcomed children when others shooed them away. He let people cry, touch him, anoint him, question him, cling to him. He didn't rush people toward "wholeness." He met them where they were.

For age regressors, Jesus offers what many caregivers, pastors, and loved ones are invited to offer too: presence without pressure. Comfort without control.

He says not, "Fix yourself," but, "*Let the little ones come to me.*"

Creating Sacred Safety

To hold space well for a regressor—whether you're a caregiver, pastor, friend, or fellow community member—requires a few spiritual disciplines:

- **Consent:** Never assume someone wants your intervention. Ask: "Would you like company right now?" or "Is there a way I can support your little self?"
- **Compassionate Curiosity:** If you don't understand regression, don't dismiss it. Be willing to learn. Ask with kindness: "What does it feel like when you regress?"
- **Consistency:** Safety comes from predictability. Gentle tone, soft presence, respectful boundaries.
- **Confidentiality:** Regressors are sharing an intimate part of themselves. Keep their trust sacred.
- **Nonjudgment:** Don't try to fix, diagnose, or spiritualize it away. Love them *as they are*.

Holding space is not about being perfect. It's about being *present*. The regressed soul doesn't need a sermon. It needs a sanctuary.

Reflection Prompt

- When has someone held space for you during a vulnerable moment?
 - What does it feel like when someone is present without judgment?
 - How can you create a space where others feel safe enough to be little?
-

Prayer for Those Who Hold Space

God of Gentle Presence,
Thank You for those who stay with me
When I regress.
Thank You for caregivers, friends, and kind strangers
Who make room for my softness.
Teach me how to hold space for others—
With reverence, not control.
With love, not fear.
With stillness, not solutions.
Let my presence be a sanctuary
Where the sacred little ones feel safe to be seen.
Amen.

Chapter 8: Liturgy and Ritual for the Little One

“Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise...”
—Matthew 21:16 (NRSVue)

What if regression was not only natural or therapeutic, but **liturgical**?

In Christian tradition, liturgy is often high, formal, and adult-centered. It's structured and serious, filled with language that assumes strength, maturity, and intellectual understanding. But Jesus tells us that *infants* and *babies* offer praise that delights God. That means regression—far from being too immature for spiritual life—may in fact offer a deeper, purer worship.

Regression opens the door to a whole new kind of liturgy: one made of blankies, soft voices, repetition, and trust. A *little liturgy*. One that doesn't perform, but simply *rests* in the presence of Love.

Rituals of Comfort and Safety

Ritual is not just about candles and vestments. It's about creating sacred time and space. For age regressors, ordinary acts can become holy rituals:

- **Hugging a stuffy** can be a form of contemplative prayer.
- **Coloring** can be a meditative act.
- **Being read to** can become a liturgical experience of being nourished.
- **Rocking** can be sacramental, embodying divine holding.

When approached with sacred intention, these actions become a liturgy of tenderness. They say: *I am safe, I am loved, I am home.*

Creating a Little Altar

Just as adults might create prayer corners or sacred spaces, regressors can create **little altars**—places where the regressed self is honored and welcomed. A little altar might include:

- A favorite stuffy or toy
- A soft light or night lamp
- A baby Bible or board book
- A bottle or paci (for those who use them as comfort items)
- A cross or icon
- A gentle song or lullaby playing softly

This altar isn't childish—it's childlike. It's a space where God meets the little one, without judgment, without expectation.

Prayer for the Little Self

Little regressors may not always be able to pray with traditional words. But that doesn't mean they can't connect with God. Prayer can be as simple as:

- "Jesus, hold me."
- "Abba, I'm scared."
- "God, I wanna cuddle."
- Or even just crying into God's arms.

Caregivers and pastors can also speak **blessings** over regressed littles, like:

- "You are safe, and God is with you."
- "Jesus loves every part of you—including the little you."
- "It's okay to need love. That's holy."

These are sacred phrases. They become liturgical words—just as holy as the Eucharist or the Psalms.

A Sample Bedtime Ritual for Littles

1. Light a candle or turn on a soft lamp.

Say: *"God is near and never leaves me, even in the dark."*

2. Hug a favorite stuffy.

Say: *"Jesus, be close to me. I feel Your hug in my stuffy."*

3. Rock gently or sway.

Say: *"God, you rock me in your arms like a baby."*

4. Say a lullaby prayer:

*"Now I lay me down in grace,
Held in love and safe in place.
Angels sing and shadows flee,
God is watching over me."*

5. Whisper:

"Goodnight, God. I love You."

Then rest. That's worship. That's liturgy.

Reflection Prompt

- What everyday rituals help you feel safe and small?
 - How could you turn your regression time into sacred space?
 - If God made a bedtime ritual just for you, what would it include?
-

Prayer for Sacred Regression Rituals

Beloved God,
You meet me in the quiet,
In the cuddle,
In the soft glow of a nightlight.
You do not ask me to pray like a grown-up.
You hear my whispers, my babbles, my sighs.
Thank You for letting me come to You
Just as I am—small, sleepy, and sacred.
Let my rituals be holy,
My blankie be blessed,
My stuffy be a sacrament.

You are with me in every lullaby.
Amen.

Chapter 9: The Franciscan Clarean Little Way

“What you are before God, that you are and no more.”
—Saint Francis of Assisi

In the heart of Franciscan spirituality is a radiant, joyful littleness.

Saint Francis called himself *“God’s little poor one.”* He embraced not only poverty of material possessions, but a poverty of ego—a willingness to be seen as foolish, small, and dependent. Saint Clare, too, left behind a life of nobility and privilege to live simply, gently, vulnerably, as a “little plant of Francis.” They did not climb toward power. They stooped toward humility. And in doing so, they found profound joy.

This is what we in the Order of Franciscan Clareans call the **Little Way**—a path of simplicity, tenderness, and holy regression. And for age regressors, it is a sacred framework that makes room for the littleness we know so intimately.

Francis and the Divine Fool

Francis was often mocked for his choices: kissing lepers, preaching to animals, dancing in the streets, begging for bread. He was, by all accounts, eccentric—even regressed in some ways. But he embraced his so-called foolishness as *freedom*. He became small to be close to the small. He chose vulnerability as a spiritual discipline.

Age regression aligns with this sacred foolishness. It is not about being ridiculous—it is about being *real*. Real in our need. Real in our softness. Real in our longing to be cared for.

To regress is to say, “I don’t need to pretend to be big. God already loves me just as I am.”

Clare and the Maternal Christ

Saint Clare described Christ as a nursing mother—full of milk and mercy. She used intimate, embodied language to describe her union with God, calling Jesus “the embrace of my soul.” Her relationship with Christ was not built on fear, but on nurture.

For regressors, Clare offers a model of mysticism rooted in **holy dependence**. To rest in Christ like a baby on a mother’s breast is not weakness—it is spiritual wisdom. Clare teaches us that we are not too much. Our longing to be held is not shameful. It is sacred.

Her rule was gentle. Her strength was quiet. Her love was fierce and soft at once. She shows us that littleness is not the absence of power—it is the **redefinition** of power.

The OFC and Sacred Littleness

In the **Order of Franciscan Clareans**, we recognize that littleness is a path of liberation. Whether expressed in poverty, vulnerability, emotional regression, or childlike wonder, it leads us closer to God. We practice:

- **Sacred Simplicity:** Not having less, but needing less.
- **Holy Dependency:** Trusting God like a baby trusts a caregiver.
- **Gentle Joy:** Embracing silliness, softness, and laughter as acts of resistance.

We honor the *Little Christ*, born in a manger, cradled in straw. We honor the *Little Saints*, who chose downward mobility over dominance. And we honor the *Little Ones* among us—age regressors, inner children, and those who live in emotional softness—as **prophets of grace**.

Reflection Prompt

- Where do you see Franciscan values in your regressed self?
 - How does your regression invite you into simplicity, humility, or joy?
 - Imagine Saint Francis or Saint Clare kneeling beside you during regression. What would they say?
-

Prayer for the Franciscan Clarean Little Way

Jesus,
Little Christ in the cradle,
Brother Francis who danced in rags,
Sister Clare who clung to You like a baby—
Thank You for the Little Way.
Thank You for showing us that we don't need to be important,
We just need to be real.
Hold me in my smallness.
Bless my blankie.
Delight in my silliness.
Let me walk the humble path of sacred regression,
Knowing I am loved,
Not in spite of my littleness—
But because of it.
Amen.

Conclusion: A Theology of Softness

The world says: be strong.

God says: *you are safe to be soft.*

In these pages, we have explored a path rarely walked in theology—a path of regression, not repression. A path where becoming smaller is not a retreat, but a return. A return to the crib, the arms, the lap of Divine Love. A return to the part of us that still longs to be held.

Age regression, whether chosen or involuntary, is not shameful. It is not weakness. It is not failure. It is *human*. It is a holy instinct—a cry for safety, for comfort, for healing. And in that cry, God is already near.

We have seen in Scripture that Jesus welcomed children, praised childlikeness, and became vulnerable himself. We've seen a God who carries, who mothers, who sings lullabies over us (Zephaniah 3:17). We've learned from Francis and Clare how littleness can be the gateway to joy.

But perhaps the greatest truth of all is this: **you are beloved in your regression.**

Not just tolerated. *Treasured.*

You don't have to hide your little self. You don't have to mask your needs. You don't have to explain why you're small today. You can come to God, as you are, in your jammies and your giggles, your tears and your blankie, and know that God says, "Welcome home."

This is a theology of softness.

Not softness as weakness.

But softness as resistance.

Softness as survival.

Softness as sacred.

In a world that hardens us, your regression is a revolution.

In a faith that often exalts strength, your littleness is a light.

You are God's baby.

You are safe to be small.

You are cradled in grace.

If your little self could speak to God, what would she say?

If God could whisper to your regressed soul, what would They say?

Write it down. Draw it out. Rock yourself gently. Know this:

You are held. You are holy. You are home.

Final Prayer: God, Be My Caregiver

Abba, Amma,
Rock me when I'm tired.
Feed me when I'm hungry.
Cuddle me when I'm scared.
Don't make me grow up too fast.
Let me rest in Your arms.
Let me regress into grace.
Let me know You love
Not just my strong self,
But my small self, too.
Forever and always,
You are my Caregiver.
And I am Your little one.
Amen.

About the Author

Sister Abigail Hester, OFC, is a transgender Christian nun, theologian, caregiver, and founder of the **Order of Franciscan Clareans**, a new monastic movement rooted in simplicity, compassion, and radical inclusion. She writes and ministers from a place of deep tenderness, fierce justice, and sacred softness.

As an age regressor herself, Sister Abigail offers a unique and prophetic voice within Christian theology—one that honors the inner child, affirms neurodiverse and traumatized bodies, and creates space for littleness in the heart of God. Her writings blend queer theology, liberation spirituality, Franciscan mysticism, and trauma-informed pastoral care into a vibrant and inclusive vision of faith.

In addition to *Cradle of Grace*, Sister Abigail is the author of numerous books, devotionals, and biblical commentaries, including works like *Little Girl, Arise: A Transgender Christian Manifesto*,

The Daily Franciscan Clarean, and The Table of Success: A Franciscan Clarean Guide to Health and Wellness.

Sister Abigail lives a contemplative life rooted in prayer, mutual aid, and healing justice. She believes that everyone deserves to be held—with kindness, with softness, with God.

You can connect with her, explore her work, or learn more about the Order of Franciscan Clareans at:

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