

GROWING OLD IN THE LORD

This morning's Father's Day message will be somewhat different than the norm. It will also be somewhat different than my ordinary Sunday morning sermon.

Today I want to talk to you about aging. This is actually a follow-up message to the one that I preached on Mother's Day. At that time, I talked to you about youth and children.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING AS IF YOU ARE GETTING A LITTLE OLDER, please listen to these 10 amazing facts about aging. I think you will enjoy them.

1. The older you get, the fewer colds you get.
2. The brain of a 60-year-old man uses the same amount of energy as a 10-watt light bulb. (This adds a whole new meaning to a person being either dim or bright.)
3. Older workers are ill or disabled less frequently than younger workers.
4. Smarter people live longer.
5. More than half of those age 40 or older think they look younger than their age--thanks largely, in my opinion, to Oil of Olay and Grecian Formula. In fact, many seniors over 65 readily admit to feeling 10-20 years younger than their chronological age.
6. Nuns live longer than women outside the church.
7. Women enjoy celebrating birthdays more than men by nearly a two to one margin.
8. The older you get the less sensitive to pain you become.
9. During the average lifetime you burn 90 million calories for each pound of body weight.
10. By the time you are 74, you will have eaten the combined weight of six elephants.

Growing older is no joke though:

- The number of people in the United States over age 65 is now larger than the entire population of Canada!
- The number of "senior citizens" is growing three times more rapidly than the national population rate.
- Two thirds of all the people who have ever lived to age 65 are alive today.
- A boomer turns 50 every eight seconds; over 5,574 people a day turn 65.

Then too, I want you young people to listen to this:

- Senior adults have over \$1.6 trillion in spending power -- that's nearly twice the U.S. average.
- They buy 41% of all new cars,
- They purchase 25% of all toys (think grandkids),
- Account for 80% of all luxury travel,
- Spend \$7 billion online annually,
- Spend more time online than teenagers, and
- Own more than three-fourths of the nation's financial wealth.

The golden years are not called "golden" for nothing.

Older people are living healthier, more active, productive, longer lives. In reality, a 65-year-old man has an estimated life expectancy of over 15 years while a woman that age has a life expectancy of 20.5 years. I find it interesting that old age is a stage of life that now lasts almost as long as youth.

One more thought before I move to my first point, some wise soul has pointed out that age 40 is the old age of youth while age 50 is the youth of old age. There, didn't that make your day?

Having said that, I want to now give you ten winning attitudes for growing older.

- 1. DON'T THINK OF YOURSELF AS BEING OLD, THINK OF YOURSELF AS BEING EXPERIENCED.**

I want you to ask yourself, are you old? Are you? Physical age is really not always the best gauge to use in determining whether or not a person is really old. Aging is as much a matter of attitude as is anything. I have personally seen “old” young people who were in their forties and young “old” people in their seventies and older. Again, are you old?

Someone wrote that we can tell if we are getting old if:

- We feel old.
- We feel as if we have learned all that there is for us to learn.
- We find ourselves saying, “I’m just too old to do that.”
- We feel that tomorrow holds no promise.
- We would rather talk than listen.
- We long for the good old days.
- We feel that the best of times are behind us.

I remember talking to a brother in my former church who was in his eighties. I so appreciated one of his comments to me. We were discussing aging when he told me, “I don’t feel old. My mind is still young.” You know, he was right.

A moment ago I used the word experienced. Notice these verses of Scripture:

- Proverbs 4:1 notes, “**Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.**”
- Proverbs 23:22 adds, “**Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.**”
- Job 12:12 shares, “**Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?**”

Did you notice how these verses speak of the wisdom and understanding of older parents? The passages simply instruct the young to listen to their parents for in doing so they will grow wiser themselves.

Along this line, the Bible shows the danger of ignoring the wisdom that comes with age. *The Living Bible* says in 1 Kings 12:13, “**The new king answered them roughly. He ignored the old men’s advice and followed that of the young men....**” If you will read the account, you will see that by ignoring the wisdom and experience of the older men, the kingdom of Israel was divided and almost destroyed.

2. DON’T BE AFRAID OF MEANINGFUL WORK

If there is a “youth potion,” it has to be meaningful activity. It can be continued work on the job or some other meaningful duty such as volunteerism, nonetheless, it is work.

I encourage such efforts as:

- SKILLS SHARING. We had a retired English teacher in the church that I used to pastor in Rapid City. She loved to tutor teenagers after school. She also taught adults how to read. Doing such things provided her with numerous opportunities to share her faith.
- DELIVER MEALS ON WHEELS. This is truly a worthy endeavor. Everyone in my family has delivered Meals on Wheels at one time or another.
- HOME MAINTENANCE FOR SHUT-INS. Plumbing, electrical, small appliance repair, accounting skills. Use your gifts and talents to help others in need.
- PRAYER TEAMS. Several members of our prayer team as well as a number of those on our prayer chain are senior saints.
- HOSPITAL AND NURSING HOME VISITATION. The Bible says in James 1:27, “**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.**” Who is better to visit in hospitals and nursing homes than someone who has experienced some of the same pains, some

of the same feelings? God notes that such caring visits testify of a religion that is pure and faultless.

- TEACHING IN THE CHURCH OR IN A PRESCHOOL. Again, my cry is, please put your years of wisdom, experience and knowledge to work. Pass it on to those who will follow you.

I know that a number of you are involved in such efforts. You are not only helping yourself, you are also helping to spread the light of God's love to others as well.

3. CONTINUE TO GROW; TO LOOK AHEAD

When we as an individual, or we as a church, become pre-occupied with looking back at the so-called "better days," we are on a short road that leads to death. By contrast, those who believe that their best days are yet ahead, and look forward to them, find long life and vitality.

The late well-known Christian industrialist R. G. LeTourneau was often asked to name the best ten years of his very productive life. His answer was always the same, "The next ten!"

Dr. Win Arn is a noted expert on aging. He signs his letters, "Growing older...but still growing." I like that. It is true. Psalm 92:12-14 states in part, "**But the godly shall flourish.... Even in old age they will still produce fruit and be vital and green.**"

Paul the Apostle noted that even though the outward man grows weak, the inner man can be renewed day by day. The point is, continue to grow; continue to look ahead.

4. HAVE COURAGE

Courage is very important in this process:

- Courage to accept change,
- Courage to build new relationships,
- Courage to face new surroundings,
- Courage to handle the physical challenges of aging.

I personally think that courage is borne of a deep abiding faith in God. We understand that when we are weak, He remains strong. His strength, in fact, is made perfect in our weakness. Therefore, regardless of our circumstances, we can be strong and courageous in the Lord!

As you know, Joshua 1:9 (*New King James Version*) is one of my favorite verses. It says, "**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**"

5. UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE LIFE PATTERNS

Some wise soul has noted, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." We are building into our lives day by day the habits and thought patterns that we carry with us into old age.

Rarely do we find grumpy old men who were not grumpy young men. On the same token, rarely do we find sweet dear old ladies who were not sweet and dear as young ladies. The attitudes that we develop as we grow tend to stay with us and become all the more imbedded as we age.

6. DEVELOP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR

We must learn to laugh at ourselves. Good humor is a secret to good aging.

Speaking of humor, I must give you the top ten benefits of turning old:

10. Kidnappers are not very interested in you.
9. In a hostage situation you are likely to be released first.
8. No one expects you to run into a burning building.
7. You have probably sown all the wild oats that you are going to sow.
6. There's very little left to learn the hard way.

5. You have a party and the neighbors don't even realize it.
4. You actually get to where you enjoy hearing about other people's operations. You can compare notes.
3. Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off.
2. Your joints are more accurate in forecasting the weather than is the National Weather Service.
1. Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.

Speaking of memory, an elderly couple had dinner at another couple's house. After eating, the wives left the table and went into the kitchen. The two elderly gentlemen were talking, and one said, "Last night we went out to a new restaurant, and it was really great. I would recommend it very highly."

The other man said, "What is the name of the restaurant?"

The first man thought and thought and finally said, "What is the name of that flower you give to someone you love? You know... the one that is red and has thorns."

"Do you mean a rose?"

"Yes," the man said. He turned toward the kitchen and yelled, "Rose, what's the name of that restaurant we went to last night?"

7. SEE THE OLDER YEARS AS RICH, FULL, PRODUCTIVE YEARS.

This would be a good time to share with you some notable achievements of people past retirement age. As you listen to these amazing feats, please understand that:

- Two-thirds of the world's most creative people are over 60 years of age.
- More than two-thirds of the men and women in medicine, education, science, government, and the arts are over 60.
- Roughly 10 percent of those attending college are over 50.

Notice now these 10 amazing achievements:

- Strom Thurmond is serving in the United States Senate. He has served since 1956 and he is now 99 years old.
- David Ray of Franklin, Tennessee learned to read at the age of 99.
- Paul Spangler completed his 14th marathon at age 92.
- At 91, Hulda Crooks climbed Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the continental United States.
- Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel lying on his back on a scaffold when he was almost 90.
- Will Durant finished his five-volume *History of Civilization* at age 89.
- The famed evangelist John Wesley preached every day at the age of 89. His prayer was, "Lord don't let me live to be useless."
- Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote "Crossing the Bar" at 83.
- Ben Franklin was still working in the government at 78 and wrote his autobiography when he was past 80.
- John Glenn went into space aboard the space shuttle when he was 77.

Many of those who led the Kingdom of God forward in Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, were older people:

- Noah,
- Abraham and Sarah,
- Moses,
- Caleb,
- Job,
- Anna,
- The Apostle Paul.

8. NEVER QUIT

We never know when the Lord will call us home. Each of us probably knows of someone who was supposed to die in such and such a length of time and yet they lived on well past that date. I have learned to not bury people until they are dead and ready to be buried. God loves to pull surprises--and He does so regularly!

Keep in mind that you may wind up living another 15-20 years, who knows? In fact, many people actually live a quarter of their life after retirement! Wouldn't it be tragic, a shame, maybe even a sin, to waste 25% of your time here on earth?

Listen. Several years ago the Associated Press ran the story of Andre Raffray. Thirty years ago, at the age of 47, he worked out a real estate deal with Jeanne Calment, age 90. He would pay her \$500 each month until her death, in order to secure ownership of her apartment in Arles, France. She could continue to live in her house until she passed away, however when she did eventually die, the apartment would then belong to Raffray. This is a common practice in France, benefiting both buyers and seniors on a fixed income.

Unfortunately for Raffray, Jeanne Calment become the world's oldest living person. At the time the AP published this account, Calment was still alive at the age of 120. She outlived Raffray, who died in December, 1995, at the age of 77. He paid \$184,000 for an apartment he never lived in. According to the contract, Raffray's survivors must continue payment until Mrs. Calment dies.

Again, the little lady lived on well past the time anyone thought she would live. We just never know when we will say good-bye to life here. Therefore, never quit.

Someone wisely said, "Retire if you must, just keep on living." That is good counsel.

Let me offer you a sidebar here. I know that one of the things that many senior adults dread most is the thought of having to move into a nursing home. I know that sometimes such a move is unavoidable. However, I want to point out that only 4.5% of those aged 65 and older lived in nursing homes in 2000. In fact, less than 20% of those over 85 presently live in a rest home. Many of these folks are still able to live by themselves or else they share a home with their family.

9. SHARE YOUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

I once read of someone who said, "I don't find the testimony of a new Hollywood convert nearly as helpful as a white-haired senior adult telling how he or she has successfully walked the road of faith through the trials of a long life." I agree.

Recently as I was reading Proverbs a verse of Scripture jumped out at me. Let me read it to you. Maybe it will speak to you as it did to me. Proverbs 13:22 states, "**A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children....**"

As I pondered that, I came up with several things that I would want to pass on to my children's children:

- I would want to leave them a good name; a name that bears no reproach.
- I would want them to know that I had regularly prayed for them.
- I would hope to pass on a blessing to each of them. I would want to have added value to their lives. I would want to have built them up; to have assured them of my love for them.
- I would hope to pass on some sort of financial blessing as well.
- I would also hope that I had passed on some happy memories of Grandpa Jackson. (Grandparents are somewhat more involved with their grandchildren than they used to be. About 65% of today's grandparents talk with their grandchildren by phone every month. More than 50% have the kids over for a meal once a month, and 40% have them over to spend the night.)
- Then too, I would hope to leave them a strong witness of my faith in God. I have already done this for my grandson, Carson Michael Pope. I have given his mother my testimony and witness in

writing. She knows that she is to eventually pass this on to him when he is old enough to understand it.

Exodus 10:2 says, **“What stories you can tell your children and grand-children about the incredible things I am doing in Egypt! Tell them what fools I made of the Egyptians, and how I proved to you that I am Jehovah.”**

The Lord wasn't interested in Moses telling of Moses' exploits or achievements. God wanted the old people to tell the young people--particularly their children and grandchildren--the mighty and wonderful things that He had done! The seniors in the camp were to recite to the next generations the faithfulness and power of an almighty God.

What was true for them is likewise true for us. We must pass our faith along! That is to be a part of their inheritance from us!

Biblical mandates don't change as we get older. God doesn't make age distinctions in His call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Expectations and commands in Scripture do not change when one reaches 65 years of age. No, we must still go; we must still share.

10. BE READY FOR DEATH

By the way, you might enjoy knowing that health club memberships for those 65 and older are up nearly 150 percent since 1988. Makes sense. I appreciate the fact that older people are trying to take better care of themselves today. Again, it is paying in longer life spans.

Nonetheless, the Bible points out that death will still eventually happen. Hebrews 9:27 notes, **“It is appointed unto man once to die.”**

To realistically look at death requires a wholesome attitude based on faith and a relationship with Jesus Christ. Dr. Malcomb Muggeridge, a British Christian author wrote that he looked forward to death “like a prisoner awaiting release, like a school boy when the end of the term is near, like a migrant bird ready to fly south.”

The Apostle Paul once called himself, **“Paul the aged.”** It was as an old man that he wrote, **“The live is Christ, to die is gain.”** He was to also note that while he was willing to continue living in this life, he much preferred going on to be at home with the Lord.

Only the assurance of eternal life in Jesus Christ could prompt such hope and courage. Do you have that same hope and assurance? That is a good question for, you see, God wants each and everyone of us to not only live life here to the full, but to also live eternity to the full as well! He not only wants us to grow old, He also wants us to grow old in the Lord.