

INSIGHTS INTO AGEING

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The fear of the Lord adds length to life.

Proverbs 10:27

When asked about the benefits of living to be 100 years old, one centenarian smiled and said, 'There's very little peer pressure.' Thanks to medical science we're living to our eighties, nineties and beyond. But living longer means dealing with the realities of ageing. Our youth-orientated culture often gives old age a bad image, but clearly God doesn't agree. To Him, old age is the reward for a life well-lived, a privilege earned, an accomplishment worth celebrating, and wisdom shared to benefit succeeding generations. Note how God sees ageing. *He views long life as evidence of His favour.* He says, 'Through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life' (Proverbs 9:11 NIV). Longevity, with all its aches and pains, is a blessing. 'The fear of the Lord adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.' You say, 'But who will take care of me when I get old?' Don't worry, God will be there for you: "I have cared for you since you were born, I will be your God throughout your lifetime - until your hair is white with age, I will care for you". (Isaiah 46:3-4 NLT). What an insurance policy! Is there proof that He does? Yes, ask the Psalmist. 'Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread' (Psalm 37:25 NLT).

The secret of ageing well is staying young at heart, staying close to God, and staying fully engaged with life. The mirror isn't your problem; *how you see yourself is.* Have you noticed how 'young' some older people are, and how 'old' their peers seem? Seeking the elusive fountain of youth isn't the answer, nor is surrendering to time and fate. Rather, do these two things. **First**, be realistic! Nothing is sillier than a woman made up to recreate what she hasn't been for decades - except an older man in an unbuttoned shirt flashing jewellery intended to recreate the macho image of a lost youth. When you are comfortable with your age and stage of life, others will be too. Solomon points out that age decreases vigour, dims vision, slackens muscles, stiffens joints, whitens hair, and so on (Ecclesiastes 12:1-5 TM). Vitamins, exercise and a good attitude help, but you must be realistic in order to handle ageing with dignity. **Second**, keep giving. 'Be generous; invest in acts of charity. Charity yields high returns. Don't hoard your goods; spread them around. Be a blessing to others' (Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 TM). *Don't stop investing your energy and resources into God's kingdom because you think it's time for the young folk to take over.* If you do that loneliness and depression will set in, and illness and death soon follow. When you shut the door, draw the curtains and isolate yourself, you're old at any age. But when you stay in the mainstream, give yourself to God and others, you'll stay young all your life!

Ageing well requires that you stay flexible. The Bible says, 'Clouds always bring rain; trees always stay wherever they fall. If you worry about the weather and don't plant seeds, you won't harvest a crop' (Ecc. 11:3-4 CEV). Certain things are inevitable in life. Clouds bring the rain. Trees fall in a storm. Like the weather, circumstances arise that you can't control. Hazard-free living is a myth; *every undertaking entails risk.* 'If you dig a pit, you might fall in; if you break down a wall, a snake might bite you. You could even get hurt by... chopping a log' (Ecc. 10:8-9 CEV). You say, 'At my age, I play it safe and take no chances.' *Avoiding risk guarantees missing what God has for you just ahead.* So how can you enjoy the final years of your life? Don't avoid; rather, *adjust, adapt and advance.* But be practical; pace yourself!

What if things take longer to do than when you were younger? Yes, your energy level may require more frequent breaks, but your advanced years allow you more time and less hurry than your frantic past. Slow down; embrace this opportunity to accomplish things you've never attempted. In his eighties, Rubinstein amazed audiences with his piano-playing skills. Gladstone became Britain's Prime Minister for the fourth time in his eighties. John Wesley preached every day aged 88. Moses led Israel at 120. Caleb led his troops against an army of giants at 80, and won. Two-thirds of the world's greatest works of art were accomplished by people over 65. Don't let a little rain, a falling tree or a possible risk stop you.

Don't let fear dominate your later years. Don't let life's 'unknowns', such as finances, health, loneliness, loss of friends and family members, get you down. The Bible says, 'You do not know the path of the wind, how bones are formed in the womb., you do not know the activity of God' (Ecclesiastes 11:5 NAS). There's much in life you'll never know, yet God has brought you this far! So, 'Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do. He's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God. Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life' (Proverbs 3:5-8 TM). It's who, not what, you know that will prosper and protect you all of your days. Put the unknown into God's hand and trust Him with your worries. 'Sow your seed in the morning [*your youthful years*] and do not be idle in the evening [*your older years*]' because your evening and your morning sowing 'will succeed, both of them.' (Ecclesiastes 11:6 NAS). Activate, don't vegetate! And decide to rejoice every day. General MacArthur said, 'Years may wrinkle the skin, but *giving up interest wrinkles the soul*. When the wires are down and your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and icy cynicism, then and only then, have you grown old.' Determine to add joy to the gift of long life. 'Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all' (Ecc.11:8 NAS).

Our culture venerates rock stars and sports figures, yet often marginalises its most knowledgeable and seasoned people. How foolish! As God's family we should treat one another according to His values. Consider how He wants us to regard our aged. **First**, we must honour them: 'Show respect for the elderly and revere your God' (Leviticus 19:32 NIV). Notice, it's a commandment, not an option. Failing to respect the elderly is failing to respect God; it bears the divine, not the cultural signature! So remember it and teach it to your children. 'A grey head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness' (Proverbs 16:31 NAS).

Second, we must encourage them. Encouraging them doesn't mean patronising, babying and doing everything for them. These behaviours destroy their dignity and disempower them. Encouraging them means believing in their God-given abilities and emphasising their positive, productive qualities. *It means motivating them to stay involved in significant service, not just busying them with meaningless and humiliating mundane tasks*. They feel like they're making a difference when their skills and wisdom are recognised.

Third, we must support them. This includes financial and material assistance offered according to practical, biblical guidelines (1 Timothy 5:1-16). Failing here means we've 'denied the faith and [are] worse than an unbeliever' (v. 8 NKJV). Support means including them as a vital part of our family and church activities. Supporting them also requires that we regularly talk to God about them and their needs.

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