



GRACEFULLY GROWING OLDER

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(Joshua 14)



rowing older is certainly no easy journey. The gray (or disappearing) hair, the new aches and pains, the need to slow down—all of these are natural, but unwanted, signs of aging. Western culture idolizes youthfulness and is constantly trying to reverse, or at least slow down, the aging process.

Life is often pictured as a bell-shaped journey. Beginning with birth, people climb through infancy and toward adulthood. It's all an uphill climb until sometime around "midlife" when the slope begins its descent, and people are "over the hill." At that point, many want to recapture those "upward" years, trying to look young, feel young, and act young. But nothing can stop the aging process and, too often, people become discontented and depressed.

With all the bad news, it is encouraging to discover that God sees aging very differently than we do. The Bible says that God is not someone we must wait to meet until after we grow old and reach the *end* of life. No, He had plans for us even before we *began* (Eph. 1:4), and will be with us at *every stage* of life (Deut. 33:25, 27). In this God's-eye view, aging is merely the final phase of an upward climb from earth to heaven.

With this encouragement, consider what the Bible teaches about how we should live as we grow older.

STAY HEALTHY

Like all people of all ages, older people should take care of the physical body (1 Cor. 3:16, 17), mind (Phil. 4:8), and spirit (Rom. 12:1, 2). Taking proper care of the body through diet and regular physical activity, maintaining social relationships, and finding continuing meaning and purpose in life are vital contributions to healthy aging. The best medical research

done by The MacArthur Foundation Consortium on Successful Aging confirms what the Bible says: The habits people form and the choices they make greatly influence how they fare in old age. Someone has said, "People don't really grow old, rather they get old because they stop growing." When people maintain the central purpose of life itself—to glorify God by loving Him and others—they can maintain their health whatever their age.

KEEP SERVING

The prayer of all people should be for God to "teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). As people age, they are a resource of wisdom and learning gained over many years. "Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding" (Job 12:12). Younger Christians of new generations need counselors, mentors, and encouragers. When the Levites had completed their years of service in the tabernacle, their experience and devotion was not lost to retirement at the age of fifty. Instead they were called to give assistance to the younger workers (Num. 8:26).

We should be realistic and understand that the wisdom gained by age will result in less *doing* and more *being*. Despite physical limitations and lifestyle changes, we always have the opportunity for a rich prayer life. Throughout their lives, people can be "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope,

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patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:11-13).

God promised Abraham that he would live to be "a good old age" (Gen. 15:15). The psalmist wrote, "With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Ps. 91:16). Solomon, in his wise proverbs, added, "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness. . . . The splendor of old men is their gray head" (Prov. 16:31; 20:29). The elderly have a special place in God's plan. Far from being abandoned and useless, they have a lifetime of experience and wisdom to share with others.

BE HOPEFUL

The Bible is very realistic about the natural losses, special needs, and difficulties people may experience as they grow older. Psalm 90:10 sounds like the preface to a Medicare document: "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Or consider the description of old age in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7.

Well-known people in Scripture illustrate the pains, losses, and afflictions of the elderly. Isaac lost his eyesight (Gen. 27:1); David could not stay warm, and his failing strength required special care (1 Kin. 1:1-4). Paul referred to himself as "Paul, the aged" (Philem. 9). In 2 Timothy 4:9-21, Paul alludes to both the physical and emotional pains of old age—feelings of abandonment and loneliness, being let down by fellow workers, and saying goodbye to friends he might not ever see again in this world.

As difficult and challenging as the physical life becomes, sufficient strength is promised: "My grace is sufficient for you,

for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). With the prospect of the end of life on earth there is the promise of eternal life: "We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. . . . We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16, 18).

Other passages to study about the issue of aging/elderly include:

- Ruth 4:15
- Psalms 37:25; 71:9, 18; 91:14-16; 92:12-15
- Proverbs 17:6; 23:22
- Lamentations 3:22, 23
- **Luke 2:25-38**
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-18
- Titus 2:1-5

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on aging/elderly at Psalm 71:9 on page 737. See also the personality profile of Caleb on page 284.

CALEB INHERITS HEBRON

⁶Then the children of Judah came to Joshua in Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: "You know the word which the LORD said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea. ⁷I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as *it was* in my heart. ⁸Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God. ⁹So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.' ¹⁰And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. ¹¹As yet I *am as strong* this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength *was* then, so now *is* my strength for war, both for going out and for

coming in. ¹²Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim *were* there, and *that* the cities *were* great *and* fortified. It may be that the LORD *will be* with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said."

¹³And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance. ¹⁴Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel. ¹⁵And the name of Hebron formerly was Kirjath Arba (*Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim*).

Then the land had rest from war.

THE LAND OF JUDAH

15 So *this was* the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families:

The border of Edom at the Wilderness of Zin southward *was* the extreme southern boundary. ²And their southern border began at the shore of the Salt Sea, from the bay that



Aging/
Elderly

PERSONALITY PROFILE

THE GRACEFUL AGING OF CALEB

(JOSHUA 14:6-15)

Caleb was a faithful warrior in the mold of Moses and Joshua, his contemporaries. Caleb and Joshua outlived the generation of Jews who escaped Egypt to enter and possess the Promised Land. Robust at the age of 85, Caleb remained an active and strong leader. He participated in the conquest of the Promised Land. Caleb received the special privilege of claiming the lands he and his progeny would possess. His actions always flowed from a bold and obedient faith.

The Bible identifies a key to Caleb's lifelong health, vitality, and special favor with God. He "wholly followed the LORD" (Josh. 14:8). His career probably started with a significant role in the exodus from Egypt. Later, Caleb and Joshua gave the positive minority report among the twelve spies Moses had sent to scout the land. The other ten expressed fear and voted to turn back. Caleb and Joshua believed that God would deliver the land into their hands in spite of scary giants and fortified cities. Caleb and Joshua were outvoted, but when the rest of their generation died, because of their unbelief, in the wilderness, Caleb and Joshua were blessed by God to live in the Promised Land.

Caleb remembered the promise of God, spoken through Moses, that his inheritance would be grand and that he would be blessed. He is a wonderful model for the proposition that a faithful life—one that perseveres through every trial and hardship—is rewarded with blessings in old age.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about aging/elderly on pages 282, 283. See also the key passage note at Psalm 71:9 on page 737.

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5 But I *am* poor and needy;
Make haste to me, O God!
You *are* my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay.

PSALM 71

GOD THE ROCK OF SALVATION

1 In You, O LORD, I put my trust;
Let me never be put to shame.
2 Deliver me in Your righteousness, and
cause me to escape;
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
3 Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to
save me,
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.
4 Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand
of the wicked,
Out of the hand of the unrighteous and
cruel man.
5 For You are my hope, O Lord GOD;
You *are* my trust from my youth.
6 By You I have been upheld from birth;
You are He who took me out of my
mother's womb.
My praise *shall be* continually of You.

I have become as a wonder to many,
But You *are* my strong refuge.

8 Let my mouth be filled *with* Your praise
And with Your glory all the day.
9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
Do not forsake me when my strength
fails.
10 For my enemies speak against me;
And those who lie in wait for my life
take counsel together,
11 Saying, "God has forsaken him;
Pursue and take him, for *there is* none to
deliver *him*."
12 O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
13 Let them be confounded *and* consumed
Who are adversaries of my life;
Let them be covered *with* reproach and
dishonor
Who seek my hurt.
14 But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
15 My mouth shall tell of Your
righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know *their* limits.
16 I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your
righteousness, of Yours only.
17 O God, You have taught me from my
youth;

KEY PASSAGE

Aging/
Elderly

IN THE TWILIGHT

(71:9)

Growing older is inevitable, but it doesn't have to tie people to their rocking chairs. Many older people can identify with the psalmist's plea, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails." Older people often feel that because they lack their youthful vigor, they cannot effectively serve God and will be cast aside. God says, however, that His people "shall still bear fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:14). Older believers have a lifetime of wisdom and experience that is valuable to younger people. Even in their advanced years, devoted believers can produce abundant spiritual fruit. Also, believers can and should continue to grow spiritually even in their twilight time. They can continue on and make a difference for God, helping build His kingdom. Young people must not dismiss older people; instead, they should look to their elders for the godly wisdom they have from years of knowing Christ.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about aging/elderly on pages 282, 283. See also the personality profile of Caleb on page 284.

²³When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. *It shall not be eaten.* ²⁴But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD. ²⁵And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: *I am the LORD your God.*

²⁶You shall not eat *anything* with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. ²⁷You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. ²⁸You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: *I am the LORD.*

²⁹Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness.

³⁰You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: *I am the LORD.*

³¹Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: *I am the LORD your God.*

³²You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: *I am the LORD.*

³³And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. ³⁴The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him

as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: *I am the LORD your God.*

³⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. ³⁶You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

³⁷Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: *I am the LORD.* ”

PENALTIES FOR BREAKING THE LAW

20 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives *any* of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. ³I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given *some* of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. ⁴And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives *some* of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, ⁵then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.

SOUL NOTE



Elder Care (19:32) God's laws include prohibitions against disrespecting the elderly. The “gray headed” and the “old man” are to be treated with honor and respect. This treatment reflects a just society. The fact that laws are needed against elder abuse—physical, sexual, verbal, or financial—shows how far modern society has strayed from this basic attitude of respect. The Bible commands respect for one's elders, who have much to teach from their vast experience. **Topic: Aging/Elderly**

SOUL NOTE



Which Craft? (20:6-9) Chapter 20 prohibits occult practices, including consulting mediums, practicing witchcraft, and sacrificing children. The prophet Samuel told King Saul that his rebellion was like the “sin of witchcraft” (1 Sam. 15:22, 23). In the Bible, rebellion is pictured as the work of Satan. What begins as a spirit of resistance often leads to a person's spiritual downfall. God does not leave doubt about His moral and spiritual absolutes. His answer to the human dilemma is to keep Satan's influence and attitudes far from us. **Topic: Occult**

- 26 "There is no one like the God of
Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to help you,
And in His excellency on the clouds.
27 The eternal God is your refuge,
And underneath are the everlasting
arms;
He will thrust out the enemy from before
you,
And will say, 'Destroy!'
28 Then Israel shall dwell in safety,
The fountain of Jacob alone,
In a land of grain and new wine;
His heavens shall also drop dew.
29 Happy are you, O Israel!
Who is like you, a people saved by the
LORD,
The shield of your help
And the sword of your majesty!
Your enemies shall submit to you,
And you shall tread down their high
places."

MOSES DIES ON MOUNT NEBO

34 Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, ²all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³the South, and the plain of

the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

⁵So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. ⁶And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. ⁷Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. ⁸And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended.

⁹Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

¹⁰But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land. ¹²and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

34:2 ^aThat is, the Mediterranean

SOUL NOTE



Age is No Object (34:7-12) Moses was 120 years old when he died. He had returned to Egypt to deal with Pharaoh when he was 80 and had been mightily used by God to free Israel from slavery (Ex. 7:7). Moses had spent the last forty years of his life in the wilderness leading the people of God who were being punished for their disobedience (Num. 14:32-35). Our generation tends to emphasize the importance of youth, but God uses servants of all ages. Age does not limit God's ability to work through people. As long as we have breath, we should be serving God.

Topic: Aging/Elderly

And those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied.

20 Those also who render evil for good,
They are my adversaries, because I follow *what is good*.

21 Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, be not far from me!

22 Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

PSALM 39

PRAYER FOR WISDOM AND FORGIVENESS

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun.

A Psalm of David.

1 I said, "I will guard my ways,
Lest I sin with my tongue;
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle,
While the wicked are before me."
I was mute with silence,
I held my peace *even* from good;
And my sorrow was stirred up.
My heart was hot within me;
While I was musing, the fire burned.
Then I spoke with my tongue:

"LORD, make me to know my end,
And what is the measure of my days,
That I may know how frail I am.
Indeed, You have made my days as
handbreadths,

And my age is as nothing before You;
Certainly every man at his best state is
but vapor. Selah

6 Surely every man walks about like a
shadow;
Surely they busy themselves in vain;
He heaps up *riches*,
And does not know who will gather
them.

7 "And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in You.

Deliver me from all my transgressions;
Do not make me the reproach of the
foolish.

I was mute, I did not open my mouth,
Because it was You who did it.

10 Remove Your plague from me;
I am consumed by the blow of Your
hand.

11 When with rebukes You correct man for
iniquity,

You make his beauty melt away like a
moth;

Surely every man is vapor. Selah

12 "Hear my prayer, O LORD,

And give ear to my cry;
Do not be silent at my tears;
For I *am* a stranger with You,
A sojourner, as all my fathers *were*.

13 Remove Your gaze from me, that I may
regain strength,
Before I go away and am no more."

PSALM 40

FAITH PERSEVERING IN TRIAL

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.

2 He also brought me up out of a horrible
pit,

Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.

He has put a new song in my mouth—
Praise to our God;

Many will see it and fear,
And will trust in the LORD.

SOUL NOTE



A Raindrop in the Ocean (39:4, 5) People's lifetimes are but a small measure in the hand of God; it is "as nothing" to Him, like a raindrop in the ocean. Yet our life span is all the time that God has given us here. One of the great challenges of aging is to understand that, while time is passing, God is working through us to make a difference in the world. No matter what our age, we must use our time wisely, fully, actively, and selflessly, giving thanks for each new day and seeking how God would have us serve Him. **Topic: Aging/Elderly**

SEEK GOD IN EARLY LIFE

- ⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
And let your heart cheer you in the days
of your youth;
Walk in the ways of your heart,
And in the sight of your eyes;
But know that for all these
God will bring you into judgment.
- ¹⁰ Therefore remove sorrow from your
heart,
And put away evil from your flesh,
For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

12 Remember now your Creator in the
days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
"I have no pleasure in them":

- ² While the sun and the light,
The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened,
And the clouds do not return after the
rain;

In the day when the keepers of the
house tremble,

And the strong
men bow down;

When the grinders
cease because
they are few,

And those that
look through
the windows
grow dim;

When the doors are shut in the streets,
And the sound of grinding is low;
When one rises up at the sound of a
bird,

And all the daughters of music are
brought low.

- ⁵ Also they are afraid of height,
And of terrors in the way;
When the almond tree blossoms,
The grasshopper is a burden,
And desire fails.
For man goes to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about the
streets.
- ⁶ Remember your Creator before the silver
cord is loosed,^a
Or the golden bowl is broken,
Or the pitcher shattered at the
fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the well.
- ⁷ Then the dust will return to the earth as
it was,
And the spirit will return to God who
gave it.
- ⁸ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"All is vanity."

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

⁹And moreover, because the Preacher was
wise, he still taught the
people knowledge; yes,
he pondered and sought
out *and* set in order
many proverbs. ¹⁰The
Preacher sought to find
acceptable words; and
what was written was
upright—words of truth.

¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, and the
words of scholars^a are like well-driven nails,

^{12:6} ^aFollowing Qere and Targum; Kethib reads
removed; Septuagint and Vulgate read *broken*.

^{12:11} ^aLiterally *masters of the assemblies*

Let us hear the conclusion of
the whole matter: Fear God and
keep His commandments, for
this is man's all.

ECCLESIASTES 12:13

SOUL NOTE



This Old House (12:1-7) The day will come when people will have to face the challenges of old age. Solomon described the human body as an old house whose windows are darkened and doors are shut—when the physical body can no longer keep up, or when the mind is no longer alert. What may appear to be a tragic loss from a human standpoint is viewed very differently from God's perspective. In the end, the body will return to the dust, but "the spirit will return to God who gave it" (12:7). The search for significance finds what it's looking for in a relationship with the eternal God.

Topic: Aging/Elderly