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For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Challenge of Older Age

Being a septuagenarian myself, I know many of the challenges of older age. Solomon called it the “difficult” days (Ecc. 12:1) but he also said, “the splendor of old men is their gray head” (Prov. 20:29). Moses encouraged us to “number our days so that we can gain a heart of wisdom” (Psa. 90:12). David said we should “bear fruit in old age” (Psa. 92:14) and Job said “wisdom is with aged men” (Job 12:12). Here are a few responsibilities we have in older age.

To God. Our first responsibility is always to our Creator and our Savior. David prayed, “O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come” (Psa. 71:17-18).

To Society. The unsaved world may despise mortality and try every way possible to prevent it, but 100% of humans have died and that percentage won’t change. Growing old gracefully is a blessing to the world around us. The date-palm tree in Israel averages 200 years and grows 100 lbs. of figs every year until it dies. Psalm 92 says we should be like the date-palm “to bear fruit in old age” and “to declare that the Lord is up-right” (Psa. 92:14-15).

To our Family. The family is the oldest and most important institution on earth. Through it we carry on God’s image, God’s mandate, and most importantly, God’s gospel salvation. Where would the world be now if every believing family had won all of their children to the Lord? The faith should be passed on to generations to come. “For He established a testimony

in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children” (Psa. 78:5-6).

To the Church. The language of family becomes the relationship we have to the “household of God,” to all of our “brothers and sisters” in “the family of God.” For many who don’t come from a believing family, water (of baptism) becomes thicker than blood. Jesus asked, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” His answer was, “Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:48, 50). Paul specifically instructed Titus to instruct the “older men” and the “older women” be a “pattern of good works” and to admonish “young men” and “young women” to “speak things that are proper for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1-6).

To Yourself. “The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31). There are too many excuses to use in your older years to keep yourself from walking with God. Paul wanted to “finish my course with joy” (Acts 20:24).

William Law spoke of our older age, “Delight in its service and beg of God to adorn it with every grace and perfection. Nourish it with good works, give it peace in solitude, get it strength in prayer, make it wise with reading, enlighten it by meditation, make it tender with love, sweeten it with humility, humble it with penance, enliven it with psalms and hymns, and comfort it with frequent reflections upon future glory.” *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, 1729.

Other observations on Older Age

Woodrow Kroll: “There was just something about those ‘old time’ missionaries, the ones who had stuck it out for thirty or forty years on the field without complaint. They had something down deep inside that I didn’t see in many of my twentieth-century students.” *The Vanishing Ministry in the 21st Century*, p. 9.

A.W. Tozer: “O God, let me die rather than to go on day by day living wrong. I do not want to become a careless, fleshly old man. I want to be right so that I can die right! Lord, I do not want my life to be extended if it would mean that I should cease to live right and fail in my mission to glorify You all of my days!” *Mornings With Tozer*, May 31.

Spurgeon: “It usually happens that, when we listen to a venerable patriarch, such as he then was, there is all the greater weight in his words because of his age. I fancy that, if I had heard the same sermon preached by a young man, I should not have thought much of it; but there appeared all the greater depth in it because it came from an old man standing almost on the borders of the grave.” *Spurgeon’s Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 208.

D.L. Moody: “The longer I live, the more I am convinced that godly men and women are not appreciated in our day. But their work will live after them, and there will be a greater work done after they are gone, by the influence of their lives, than when they were living.” *Spiritual Power*, p. 107.

Francis Schaeffer: “Much of the younger generation surely is like this: they know nothing of saying ‘no’ to themselves or anything else. But this is only half true, because the older ones are also like this.” *True Spirituality*, p. 20.

Thomas a’ Kempis: “Vanity it is, to wish to live long, and to be careless to live well.” *The Imitation of Christ*, p. 24.

John MacArthur: “At the age of 83—after having traveled some 250,000 miles on horseback, preached more than 40,000 sermons, and produced some 200 books and pamphlets—John Wesley regretted that he was unable to read and write for more than 15 hours a day without his eyes becoming too tired to work. After his 86th birthday, he admitted to an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning!” *Titus*, 72.

An Old Disciple

“There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge” (Acts 21:16).

“Such a great concourse of people there was to the feast that it was a hard matter to get lodgings; the public houses would be taken up by those of the better sort, and it was looked upon as a scandalous thing for those that had private houses to let their rooms out at those times, but they must freely accommodate strangers with them. Every one then would choose his friends to be his guests, and Mnason took Paul and his company to be his lodgers; though he had heard what trouble Paul was likely to come into, which might bring those that entertained him into trouble too, yet he shall be welcome to him, whatever comes of it.

“This Mnason is called an old disciple - a disciple from the beginning; some think, one of the seventy disciples of Christ, or one of the first converts after the pouring out of the Spirit, or one of the first that was converted by the preaching of the gospel in Cyprus, Acts 13:4. However it was, it seems he had been long a Christian, and was now in years. Note, It is an honourable thing to be an old disciple of Jesus Christ, to have been enabled by the grace of God to continue long in a course of duty, stedfast in the faith, and growing more and more prudent and experienced to a good old age. And with these old disciples one would choose to lodge; for the multitude of their years will teach wisdom” (Matthew Henry).

Barna Reports

“When asked about the most influential people in their spiritual journey, most U.S. adults name family and friends. Generally, mothers (57%), fathers (33%), grandmothers (24%) and friends (20%) rank highest on the list. For older adults, though, the influence of a pastor is also prevalent. More than one in four Elders (27%) and one in five Boomers (21%) say a pastor has been the most influential to their spiritual journey. This finding points to the critical role pastors play in the lives of seniors. Amid the Church’s rally cry to reach younger generations, pastors are still most trusted by older adults.” *Faith-Generations*, Oct. 18, 2023.