

Growing Old Gracefully

by

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In speaking about “Growing Old Gracefully” I sometimes feel like that I am too young to speak as one should on this subject, but at other times I feel that I could speak volumes about it.

Most young people do not think about “growing old,” which is understandable; for they have yet to experience the reality of “growing old” in the sense of one’s physical strength and mental capabilities declining. For them getting older has always meant getting better as they draw closer to the peak of their physical maturity.

If they talk about “growing old” it is often with disdain for the way many “old people” spend their waning years who sometimes are discontented with life, are set in their ways. or are bitter towards many people.

There is often truth in what the young say about the old: “Some old men and women grow bitter with age. The more their teeth drop out the more biting they get in their attitude and complain about their aches and pains.” This has prompted many young people to say: “I will never be like that when I get old!”

But growing old gracefully does not happen by accident. Unless one understands and applies certain principles while young, the chances are great that he or she will likely become just like the elderly they are quick to scorn.

Think carefully about this statement: “Most men spend the first half of their lives making the second half miserable.” How are you spending the first half of your life; or, how will you spend the last half of your life? Will you grow old gracefully?

Before we consider certain principles helpful to graceful aging, we need to consider...

The possibility of growing old gracefully as illustrated by biblical examples

Moses, at the age of 120: Deut. 34:7, “*And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.*”

Throughout Deuteronomy Moses’ speech was filled with vigor.

Joshua, as he addressed the elders of Israel (note his conviction). Joshua 24:15, “*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*”

Barzillai, the Gileadite, showed gracious hospitality at age eighty. 2 Sam. 19:31-38, “*And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old [80 years old]: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee.*”

Dorcas, who helped the poor and widows. Acts 9:36-39, “*Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*”

The graceful manner in which Paul faced death. 2 Tim. 4:6-8, *“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*

Peter aged gracefully as death approached. (2 Pet. 1:13-15), *“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”*

The possibility of growing old gracefully as illustrated by personal examples

One does not need to go to the Bible to find the only examples of people growing old gracefully. I am sure that we have all known such people. I have been blessed to know a number of such people in my life.

Yes, growing old gracefully is possible! When it occurs, it is beautiful to behold...

Too often wrinkles are not joined with grace

How can we who are young live today so as to grow old gracefully, and not pathetically? How can those who are old be graceful in their old age?

There are several principles that when applied can ensure that growing old will be a graceful experience...

The principles of growing old gracefully

Gal. 6:7-8, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh*

shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

This is true in all areas of life.

For example, in the physical realm: You sow corn, you reap corn; you take good care of your body, and you enjoy good health; you disregard healthy habits, and your body will suffer for it.

This is especially so in the spiritual realm. Job 4:8, *“Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.”*

Much of the bitterness, discontent, and anger which characterize many older people is the result of “sowing to the flesh”.

Note the works of the flesh — the result of sowing to the flesh: (Gal. 5:19-21, *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Contrast the fruit of those who sow to the Spirit : Gal. 5:22-23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”*

How much better to do as Hosea says in Hos. 10:12, *“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”*

Yet the young often say: “I want to sow my wild oats while I am still young”. Then what? Hope for a crop failure sometime (but not now) in their sowing oats? (Don’t count on it).

They fail to realize the harvest of trouble they will reap later in life: Abuse their body and their health will be ruined; engage in sexual immorality and they will ruin their reputation, and make it difficult to have a normal family life and the joy it ought to bring.

Consider the sad irony of it all. Most young people do not realize that the popular lifestyle of “doing your own thing” and “sowing your wild oats” is the very thing that produces the pathetic mental and physical condition found in many older people! So while they

condemn the old for the way they wasted their lives and the way they turned out, they too are headed down the same path of corruption!

Samuel Johnson once said, “He that would pass the latter part of life with honor and decency must, when he is young, consider that he shall one day be old...”

Matt. 4:4, “*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*”

Let’s focus our attention on two words in this verse:

- Bread — involves more than just dough; includes all things of a material nature.
- Live — involves more than simple existence; includes living life in its fullest sense, i.e., an abundant life.

We must realize one does not find the good life in seeking and acquiring material things. Luke 12:15, “*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*”

If we don’t learn this while young, and remember it when we are old, we will waste much of our life pursuing the wrong things, and hate ourselves for it when we face death’s door.

Solomon came to this realization: Eccl. 2:17-23, “*Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.*”

There is more to life than material things; to grow old gracefully we must realize this and find that which makes life full and abundant!

Fortunately, Jesus came to help us. John 10:10, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*

He is the true and living Way! John 14:6, *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

And it is the Word of God that shows us the way to Christ. John 5:39, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”*

This illustrates the truth of Matt. 4:4, *“But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”*

The Word of God reveals Christ to us, who in turn shows us how to really live, for He is the Life!

What a shame to go through life, only to find at last our labors were of no lasting value. Luke 9:25, *“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”* Luke 12:15-21, *“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

Wisdom is important to growing old gracefully. Wisdom is understanding which enables one to make the best use of his or her talents and circumstances, avoiding the mistakes and pitfalls of life.

The value of wisdom is beautifully proclaimed in Prov. 3:13-18, *“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth*

understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.”

And wisdom is illustrated in Eph. 5:15-16, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”*

The days are evil; the time is short. James 4:13-14, “*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”*

Wisdom helps one to utilize to the fullest what little time we have, instead of wasting our precious time.

Wisdom can be acquired in two ways:

- Personal experience, which can be very wasteful and time-consuming. You can spend much of your life in trial and error, repeating the same mistakes made by others. While you may finally gain wisdom...you have not only wasted much time in the trials, you have to bear the consequence of your errors (you reap what you sow).
- Wisdom can also be acquired by God and His Word (Prov. 2:6), “*For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”*

What better source, than from He who by wisdom created the universe. Prov. 3:19-20, “*The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.”*

With such wisdom, especially at an early age, our journey through life will more pleasant and graceful. Prov. 3:21-26, “*My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.*

Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.”

We can get a head start and soon pass those who learn only through trial and error. Psa. 119:97-100, *“O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.”*

With the wisdom found in God’s Word, it is possible to grow old gracefully, and be graceful in old age. For in it we learn: How to avoid the needless suffering experienced by those reaping the results of learning by trial and error. The true purpose of life is not found in the material things of life, but in that which Jesus Christ has to offer!

To help us apply these principles, here are some practical steps based upon Paul’s exhortations to the young preacher Timothy...

Practice growing old gracefully

Be an example to others. 1 Tim. 4:12, *“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”*

There is no way you can avoid being an example to others. You will either be a good example; or you will be an example of what not to be.

Determine to be an example of those who believe, and this will set you on the right track of one who grows old gracefully!

Commit yourself to the word of God. 1 Tim. 4:13, *“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”*

Commit yourself to studying and teaching the Word of God to others. This will assure that you have an open line to God’s wisdom.

So study the Bible daily, and share what you learn with others! Cultivate your talents. 1 Tim. 4:14, "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee...*"

The degree to which you reap will be based upon the ability with which you can sow. If you want to reap a large harvest of good in this life, develop your talents! Apply diligence to your efforts. 1 Tim. 4:15-16, "*Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*"

Growing old gracefully, like many good things, does not happen by accident. It takes concentrated effort, so be diligent and persevere!

Conclusion

Is it possible to triumph over old age, to grow old gracefully? Yes, for I have seen it happen time and again!

But those of us who are young must realize that experience is reserved for.....

Those who follow the wisdom of God.

Those who understand the abundant life is not found in worldly things.

Those who sow in such a way as to bear fruit and reap a harvest leading to eternal life.

Such a person will be like those described in Psalm 92:12-15, "*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*"

Don't you wish to be like that? By the grace of God you can!

In Christ Jesus you can become a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), made possible by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5).

The sooner you begin this new life, the less "baggage" of the old life you will have to contend with, and the more you can do for the Lord

