

## Ageing.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”. What a thought wasting away outwardly! Yes, we are all getting older. Some of the biggest money making products today are cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, anti-ageing cream, hair dyes, diet plans and exercise programmes. Everything is going south! We are ageing. Youthful days soon pass by. Mark Twain said, “Life would be infinitely happier if we could be born at age eighty and gradually approach eighteen”. Benjamin Button is fiction. But it’s not all bad. There is some good news! Human life span is twice as long as a chimpanzee, sixty times as long as a mouse! The giant Tortoise beats us at longevity at a one hundred and fifty two years lifespan.

Ageing is a reality we have to face. We see its progress. Hair turns grey, although Solomon did say, “Grey hair is a crown of splendour it is attained by a righteous life” – Proverbs 16:31. Skin loses its elasticity. Someone said, “When you get to old for pimples you go right into wrinkles”. Eyesight isn’t as good as it was. Someone prayed, “Lord, give me the senility to forget the people I never liked, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference”! At thirty years of age we have two hundred and forty taste buds at seventy only eighty eight. Along with that there’s stiffness of joints, aches and pains and we reach the point where actions *creak* louder than words. At thirty five years of age we have ten billion brain cells which begin to die off at the rate of one hundred thousand a day!

The great Bible chapter on ageing is Ecclesiastes twelve. We are commanded to “remember our creator in the days of our youth before the days of trouble come” verse 1. Those days are described as a time of dimness

of sight (verse 2), loss of teeth (verse 3) and little sleep (verse 4) and a lot more.

Now all this isn't said to depress you. It's simply being honest and realistic. It's a fact of human existence that we cannot deny. We must, though, develop a Christian response to ageing. Although our outward man is perishing, something wonderful is also happening in the ageing believer. Inwardly we are being renewed. Our main focus as we age physically is to focus on the development and growth of the inward man, that is, your spiritual nature. The hymn says, "Change and decay all around me I see". It can be seen both physically and psychologically. John says in 1 John 2:17, "The world and its desires pass away". We see this environmentally, ecologically, and materially. The world and its pleasures don't last. It's impossible for this passing world to last because only what is eternal does. Scripture tells us, "We fix our eyes on not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal" – 2 Corinthians 4:18. It's futile living for physical pleasures because they are passing away. On the one hand it might be a worrying time when we are conscious of the decline of our faculties. It can certainly be a joyful time of spiritual growth and achievement. What's involved in spiritual renewal in the face of outward deterioration?

Consider a couple of examples from the Bible. In Luke's gospel we meet Anna. We are told that she is very old-Luke 2: 36. Yet she sparkled with spiritual youthfulness and vitality. Anna teaches us that spiritual renewal is achieved by a number of things.

First, worship. Verse 37 tells us that "she never left the Temple but worshipped night and day". She was a widow who had lost her husband seven years previous, but she hadn't let this make her bitter. The difficulties of life

can do this. Life has a way of making us sour if we let it. Someone said that in life, “You are either pickled in vinegar or honey”! The choice is yours and it depends on how you react to life’s blows. Anna prayed and fasted. She kept close to the Lord in sweet fellowship.

Second, Anna kept busy in the work of God. According to scripture worship is expressed in service. Anna served God in the Temple. Paul said, “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual worship”-Romans 12:1-2. When you get involved in the life of your church it gives you purpose. Your time will be filled with meaningful service for the Saviour. One Pastor said, “I see many senior adults turn to board games, knitting, sewing, playing cards, or fishing in the last years. Why can’t they use these years to serve God?”. There’s nothing particularly sinful in those past times. But God in his goodness has given the senior adult much valuable spare time that could be used in his service.

Third Anna witnessed for the Lord. We read in Luke 2:38, “She spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”. Grow old telling others about the Saviour. Never tire of making friends. Get along side people and give them the benefit of your wisdom gained over many years, and especially your wise words about salvation.

Our second example is Caleb. We read about him in the Old Testament book of Joshua. We read in Chapter 14 verse 10 that he was eighty five years old! Inward renewal comes by focusing on vision and commitment to the furtherance of God’s kingdom. Someone wrote this short poem, “I am fully aware that my youth has been spent, that my get up and go has got up and went, but I really don’t mind, when I think with a grin, of all the grand places my get up has been!” There’s someone who had looked back on life and did so

with a smile because he had got up and got involved. So had Caleb. At 85 he still had some get up and go. Caleb said to Joshua, "I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle as I was then. Now give me the hill country that the Lord promised me that day" (verses 11 and 12). Devotion to God's work doesn't necessarily end at retirement age! Caleb had vision and enthusiasm at 85. Now admittedly, not everyone is as physically fit and able as Caleb was. Some believers face severe limitations brought on by age and sickness. But as we are able have this resolve to serve the Lord with the grace and strength you have. You can remain young and active within your soul. Don't develop an old-age mindset. Be as much ambitious for Christ as you can into your senior years. All of this will contribute to your inward man being renewed with the passing years.

So develop some good spiritual disciplines now that will become stronger as you age. Make sure Jesus is Lord of your life every day. Seek his Kingdom first and his righteousness-Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 3: 5-6. Develop a good prayer life-Luke 18:1. If retirement draws near plan ahead on how you will use the free time you will have. Some people acknowledge they are growing old and feel it's time to step down and let others do the work in church life. I can understand their thoughts. But it's not biblical thinking. Retirement frees you up to a large extent. You are in a position to devote more time than ever you were able to do years ago to the service of Christ and his church. Ask God where he wants to use you. Look for opportunities you missed in earlier years during your working life. Someone made this observation, "Preparation for old age should begin no later than ones teens. A life which is empty of purpose until 65 will not suddenly become filled on retirement".

A Pastor drove an elderly lady home from church one Sunday. She moved slowly and painfully into the car. She asked, "Why does God let us get old and weak? Why must I hurt so?" The Pastor replied, "I'm not sure but I have a theory". "What is it?" she asked. "Well", said the Pastor, "I think that God has planned the strength and beauty of youth to be physical, but the strength and beauty of age to be spiritual. We gradually lose the strength and beauty that is temporary, so we'll concentrate on the strength and beauty which is forever".

Grow old gracefully.