

Old Age: Taking Care or Taking Advantage?

2 Corinthians 4:16

INTRODUCTION:

Lesson Text: 2 Corinthians 4:16 – “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”

An interesting story appeared in Sports Illustrated. It seems that some con artist is going around to aging athletes who have Alzheimer’s posing as “Dr. James Hartman.” He claims to be purchasing memorabilia for a museum. He takes their trophies, game balls, jerseys and leaves them with a rubber check. The article ends only half-joking that the writer hopes this person is caught and hanged. Such abuse of the elderly gets our ire up . . . we want somebody to do something.

We should stop to consider. We might do, by neglect, what another does by fraud. At age twenty-six, Pat Moore performed a remarkable experiment. An industrial designer, Moore wanted a better understanding of senior adults, so for three years she frequently disguised herself as an eighty-five-year-old woman. She utilized a professional makeup artist and visited 116 cities throughout fourteen states and two Canadian provinces in her elderly persona. From her experience, Moore estimates that one of 25 senior adults is abused, with most victims being over 75. She was impressed with the compassion and care she received from senior adults when she was in character, but she received harsher treatment from younger generations)

America is getting older. In 2002, **21.5** percent of Americans were over **55** (approximately 62,204,000). The average life expectancy for those born in 2001 is **77.2** and was projected to be **77.8** in 2005 and **78.5** in 2010. The ratio of adults aged 65 and over compared with people aged 20 to 64 will increase by 80 percent in the coming decades. This is partly because the average life expectancy has risen from **47** years in 1900 to **78** years today, and is projected to be **84.5** years by the year 2050. The 2010 Census counted **53,364** people age

100 and older in the United States, and they were overwhelmingly female. For every 100 centenarian women, there were only **20.7** centenarian men. Barring Jesus' return, or accident or disease, we will all one day face "old age." While that is the direction our society is moving . . . Our bodies are not constructed to last forever. Paul wrote that our "outward man" (bodies) are "perishing" (running down) even as the "inward man is renewed" day by day" (**2 Corinthians 4:16**). Although both life-expectancy and quality of life have increased drastically in industrialized countries this century, the end of life can still be hard.

Thankfully, many of our loved ones will live longer. But this often presents the added challenge of dealing with aging relatives. Using the Golden Rule as our guide ("Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (**Matthew 7:12**)), let us treat others as we will want to be treated. How do we apply the Golden Rule to the older members of our families, communities, and churches? How will we want to be treated in our later years?

WE WILL WANT OTHERS TO TAKE TIME FOR OUR LONELINESS.

Imagine being surrounded by the same four walls for twenty-four hours a day every day! Think about saying good-bye to many lifelong associates. Ann Landers once ran this thought provoking entry:

Dear Ann Landers: In the last decade I have witnessed an alarming disrespect for the elderly. In many cultures, old folks are venerated and valued, but not in America. I find this sad and frightening. A few years ago, you printed a column about grandfather's birthday. I showed it to my grandchildren. They were visibly moved and, I might add, have been a lot more attentive to their grandparents since then. Will you please run it again? St. Petersburg.

Dear St. Pete: With pleasure. Here it is.
It was grandfather's birthday. He was 79. He got up

early, showered, combed his hair, and put on his Sunday best so he would look nice when they came. He skipped his daily walk to the town café where he had coffee with his cronies. He wanted to be home when they came.

He put his porch chair on the sidewalk so he could get a better view of the street when they drove up to help celebrate his birthday. At noon he got tired but decided to forgo his nap so he could be there when they came. Most of the rest of the afternoon he spent near the telephone so he could answer it when they called.

He has five married children, 13 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. One son and daughter live within ten miles of his place. They hadn't visited him for a long time. But today was his birthday and they were sure to come.

At supper he sat on the porch waiting. At 8:30 he went to his room to prepare for bed. Before retiring he left a note on the door . . . "Be sure to wake me up when they come.

It was grandfather's birthday. He was 79.

China has enacted a law that can punish children who go extended periods of time without paying a visit to their parents.

In our hustle and bustle world, it is hard to find time to sit with aged relatives and fellow Christians, and if we are not careful, we will neglect this duty—and corrupt our religion. James said, 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world' (**James 1:27**). "Visit" here means to see after the needs." One of these needs is conversation and discussion. John added, "But whoso hath this world's good, and sees his brother have need, him, how dwells the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (**1 John 3:17-18**). According to **Ephesians 5:16**, let us use our days wisely ("redeeming the time") and give one occasionally to an elderly person.

WE WILL WANT OTHERS TO HAVE PATIENCE WITH OUR INFIRMITIES.

Most of us will better be able to identify with Solomon than Moses. Moses was an exception to the rule of human aging. At his death, his “eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (**Deuteronomy 34:7**). Most of us will wear glasses; most of us will not be able to bench press at 70 what we could at 20. Solomon, on the other hand, described the aging process with which most of us can identify:

Ecclesiastes 12:3-7 – “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. 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. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

- **keepers of the house** — Your arms and hands tremble.
- **strong men** — Your legs, knees, and shoulders weaken and you walk bent over.
- **grinders** — You start to lose your teeth.
- **windows** — Your vision begins to deteriorate.
- **doors** — Either your hearing starts to fail, or you close your mouth because you've lost your teeth.
- **grinding** — You can't chew your food, or your ears can't pick up the sounds outdoors.
- **rise up** — You wake up with the birds early each morning, and wish you could sleep longer.
- **music** — Your voice starts to quaver and weaken.
- **afraid** — You are terrified of heights and afraid of falling while you walk down the street.

- **almond tree** — If you have any hair left, it turns white, like almond blossoms.
- **grasshopper** — You just drag yourself along, like a grasshopper at the close of the summer season.
- **desire** — You lose your appetite, or perhaps your sexual desire.
- **long home** — You go to your eternal [long] home and people mourn your death.
- Verse 6 describes **a golden bowl — a lamp — hanging from the ceiling on a silver chain.**

The chain breaks and the bowl breaks. The fragile "cord of life" is snapped and the light of life goes out. Only wealthy people could have such costly lamps, so Solomon may be hinting that death is no respecter of persons.

In an award-winning article entitled, *A View From 80*, Malcolm Cowley described what it was like to be old: when it becomes an achievement to do thoughtfully, step by step, what you once did instinctively when he can't stand on one leg and has trouble pulling on his pants when he spends more time looking for things than he spends using them after he has found them when he listens hard to jokes and catches everything but the snapper."

What's the application? **Patience.** Though the old man is only going 40 miles per hour down the interstate, or grandma takes forever to get to the car, or granddad must be told everything three times, let us 'add to our temperance, patience" (**2 Peter 1:6**). To make sure an old person hears you, touch his arm and have him look at you as you speak. Speak clearly, hold up objects to which you refer, and give her clues to establish a context without sounding impatient or upset. As for vision, keep in mind that older people need better lighting and have trouble adapting to the dark. Night lights should be included in each room.

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially' unto them who are of the household of faith" (**Galatians 6:9-10**).

WE WILL WANT OTHERS TO RESPECT OUR THOUGHTS.

Unfortunately, society widely practices something called “social dismissal” of the elderly. The following letter came from a nurse who works in a geriatric ward at Ashludie Hospital in Yorkshire, England. She found the following poem in the belongings of an elderly patient who had passed away:

What do you see, nurses, what do you see?
 Are you thinking when you are looking at me—
 A crabby old woman, not very wise
 Uncertain of habit, with faraway eyes
 Who dribbles her food and makes no reply,
 When you say in a loud voice, “I do wish you’d try;

Who seems not to notice the things that you do,
 And forever is losing a stocking or shoe?
 Who uninteresting or not, lets you do as you will
 With bathing and feeding the long day to fill?
 Is that what you’re thinking, is that what you see?
 Then open your eyes, nurse, you re not looking at me.

I’ll tell you who I am as I sit here so still,
 As I rise at your bidding, as I cat at your will;
 I’m a small child often with a father and mother,
 Brothers and sisters who love one another.
 A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet,
 Dreaming that soon now a lover she’ll meet.
 A bride soon at twenty, my heart gives a leap,
 Remembering the vows I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now I have young of my own
 Who need me to build a secure, happy home.
 A woman of thirty my young now grow fast,
 Bound to each other with ties that should last.
 At forty my young sons have grown and are gone,
 But my man’s beside mc to see I don’t mourn.
 At fifty once more babies play at my knee,

Again we know children, my loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead.

I look at the future I shudder with dread.

For my young are all rearing young of their own,
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.

I'm an old woman now, and nature is cruel;

'Tis her jest to make old people look like a fool.

The body it crumbles, grace and vigor depart,

There is now a stone where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,

And now and again my battered heart swells.

I remember the joys, I remember the pain,

And I'm loving and living life over again.

I think of the years all too few, gone too fast;

And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.

So open your eyes, nurses—open and see,

Not a crabby old woman. Look closer at me!

Every church member is valuable (1 Corinthians 12:14-18), including—perhaps especially—elderly members. Though some may have been “put out to pasture,” we should retrieve them to be “teachers of good things” (Titus 2:1-4). We should not assume that older people are incapable of making decisions and understanding a modern world. Include them in discussions, invite their opinions, and consider their experiences. They likely have some advice worth hearing (Job 12:12). If Rehoboam had respected his elders, Israel might not have split (1 Kings 12:6-13). The law said, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary, and honour the face of the old man . . . (Leviticus 19:32). Consider, too, that “Honor thy father and mother” (Ephesians 6:2) was not just written for young children!

WE WILL WANT PHYSICAL ASSISTANCE.

We hope to be able to provide for ourselves all of our lives, but we may need physical help later in life. One comedian quipped, “Money can't buy health. And it's getting so it can't support sickness either.”

With the increasing costs of medication and hospitalization, some find more truth than humor in that statement. Paul taught that these costs are to be provided by the family, as they are able: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel . . . If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” (I Timothy 5:8, 16; Matthew 15:1-9). This may include finances, seeing after physical work they cannot do, or providing health care. In a day when some forsake the old when they needed them most, Solomon’s words bear repeating: “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old” (**Proverbs 23:22**).

As Premier Golda Meir of Israel said some years ago: “Seventy is not a sin.”

Opportunities to serve the elderly in this congregation and the community. Many are so neglected by their loved ones.

God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation