

## SENIOR SAINTS

### Growing Older God's Way

It's hard to believe we're into 2018! The years seem to go faster and faster as you get older. Some wit said that life is like a roll of toilet paper: as you get to the end it goes faster! We're all getting older, and I thought at the beginning of a New Year, it would be interesting to survey what God says in His Word about growing older. He does say quite a lot about it—important things for us to consider.

The Bible doesn't hide the negative aspects of getting older. One of the most poetic descriptions in all literature of the infirmities of old age comes from Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7.

1 “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”.

2 “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain;”

3 “when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim;”

4 “when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint;”

5 “when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”

6 “Remember Him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well,”

7 “and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Solomon urged his readers to commit their lives to God while they were still young, because this is what happens as you grow older...

Verse 1: Daily life becomes more difficult.

Verse 2: The eyes grow dim, sight isn't so good. The capacity for joy diminishes and more sorrows come.

Verse 3: “Keepers of the house” refers to protection, the arms; “strong men” refers to the legs; “grinders” refers to teeth; “looking through the windows” refers to the eyes.

Verse 4: “Doors closed” = reduced access to the outside world, lack of hearing.

“sound of grinding” = the hum of everyday life for the young people.

“rise at the sound of birds” – old people often get up earlier, or walk around in the early hours.

“songs now faint” – voice weakens.

Verse 5: “people are afraid of heights” = fearful of heights and journeys.

“almond tree” = hair turns grey then silver.

“grasshopper” = laborious and ungainly walk of the elderly.

“desire” = passions aren't as strong as they used to be

Verse 6: Death comes.

Verse 7: Return to dust. The Spirit is what is important. Our life, our personality, our character, is contained in that. Spirit doesn't go through decay and death. The Message version is quite colourful:

Ecclesiastes 12:1-5 (The MSG)

<sup>1-2</sup> Honour and enjoy your Creator while you're still young,  
Before the years take their toll and your vigour wanes,  
Before your vision dims and the world blurs  
And the winter years keep you close to the fire.  
<sup>3-5</sup> In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.  
Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.  
The shades are pulled down on the world.  
You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.  
The hum of the household fades away.  
You are wakened now by bird-song.  
Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.  
Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.  
Your hair turns apple-blossom white,  
Adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.  
Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest,  
While your friends make plans for your funeral.

So we are told to "number our days" (Psalm 90:10-12)—think carefully of how we are using our lives.

A Bible example of an old person you may not have heard much about is the story of Barzillai.

2 Sam. 19:31-39 <sup>31</sup> Barzillai the Gileadite also came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there. <sup>32</sup> Now Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. <sup>33</sup> The king said to Barzillai, "Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you." <sup>34</sup> But Barzillai answered the king, "How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? <sup>35</sup> I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is enjoyable and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of male and female singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? <sup>36</sup> Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way? <sup>37</sup> Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever you wish." <sup>38</sup> The king said, "Kimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him whatever you wish. And anything you desire from me I will do for you." <sup>39</sup> So all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and bid him farewell, and Barzillai returned to his home.

One thing this shows is that someone's greatest service can be given in his old age. The one service deed from his entire life that was recorded in the Bible took place when he was an old man. He could have said he had enough to worry about at his age, and not helped, but he did what he could to help the King. And then he humbly stood back in favour of someone else, because old age had taken its toll on him, and he acknowledged that.

There are lots of other Bible examples of people God used in their advanced years.

**Noah** was over 500 when he built the ark.

**Isaac** was born when Abraham was 100 years old (Genesis 21:2)

**Moses** was 80 when God called him to go back to Egypt and lead the people out of slavery, and he remained their leader until he died at age 120.

**Joshua** served in his old age too—died at age 110.

We read about the attitude of **Caleb** in his words to Joshua. A vigorous attitude at age 85!

Joshua 14:10-12 <sup>10</sup> *“Now then, just as the LORD promised, He has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time He said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! <sup>11</sup> I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. <sup>12</sup> Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as He said.”*

**Anna the Prophetess**—an active disciple at age 84.

Luke 2:36-37 <sup>36</sup> *“There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”*

**Dorcas** helped the poor and widows in her final years.

Acts 9:36-39 <sup>36</sup> *“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. <sup>37</sup> About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. <sup>38</sup> Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!” <sup>39</sup> Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.”*

We see in Philemon verse 9 that **Paul** was an “old man”...

Philemon 9 “yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus”

but he was still doing the work, as we see in verse 22.

<sup>22</sup> And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

Notice his attitude in Phil. 3:13-14 <sup>13</sup> *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

and the graceful manner he faced death in 2 Tim. 4:6-8

<sup>6</sup> “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

<sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”

**Peter** knew he was old, so he worked hard to make sure the truth would be remembered.

2 Peter 1:12-15 <sup>12</sup>“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. <sup>13</sup>I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, <sup>14</sup>because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. <sup>15</sup>And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.”

And **John** was an elderly man when he wrote Revelation.

There are plenty of examples of older people these days who have served God into old age.

Billy Graham is now 99 and is sometimes still mentioned as inspiring and encouraging people. J. Oswald Sanders wrote a Christian book each year from age 65 to his death at age 90. Herbert W. Armstrong is an example, as is Charles Stanley. Stanley is 85, and about a month ago said “I don’t believe in retirement. It’s not biblical.” But I disagree with him on that. Retirement is mentioned in the Bible and even commanded by God!

Numbers 8:23-25 <sup>23</sup>“The LORD said to Moses, <sup>24</sup>“This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, <sup>25</sup>but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer.”

A specific case, admittedly, but the principle is that it is okay to retire. Even God rested after 6 days creating the world.

Mark 6:31 “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

Jesus rested after working.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot”  
There is a time and season for everything.

Phil. 4:11 “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”

Don’t resent growing old. It’s part of life. Even God is called the “Ancient of Days”!

Ecclesiastes 11:8 “However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all.”

Enjoy all of our life. One of the special things about old age is the blessing of grandchildren. The Bible has a lot to say about this.

Psalms 128:5-6 <sup>5</sup>“May the LORD bless you from Zion; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. <sup>6</sup>May you live to see your children’s children—peace be on Israel.”

Genesis 50:22-23 <sup>22</sup>“Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father’s family. He lived a hundred and ten years <sup>23</sup>and saw the third generation of Ephraim’s children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph’s knees.”

Joseph enjoyed his great-grandchildren.

Joel 1:2-3 <sup>2</sup>“Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? <sup>3</sup>Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.”

We have the opportunity to teach things to our children and grandchildren.

Leviticus 19:32 “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.”

This is one verse I shouldn't leave out of this sermon. Hopefully young people look up to the elderly. But we need to show ourselves worthy of honour and respect, by our behaviour. God respects and values older people highly.

The key is to include God in our lives—Jesus Christ should be at the centre of all we are and do.

Your **Old** years can be your **Gold** years, if God is in them, where G = **God**. Old age gives us time to read, study and pray without having lots of work to attend to.

In summary, when we consider the older people looked up to in the Scriptures, we see that they all continued to be devoted to God, and were actively involved in living God's Way and sharing it with others.

Psalms 71 was a Psalm written by an older person, and gives helpful pointers for “senior saints.”

Psalms 71:9 “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.”

This is the way we tend to pray as we get older. If we walk with God throughout our lives, He will look after us when we get older and can't do what we did before.

Verse 18 “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.”

Even when we are old, our desire and passion should be to proclaim God's truth to others. One way to fulfil this is to share God's way with our children and grandchildren.

Isaiah 46:3-4 <sup>3</sup>“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob, all the remnant of the people of Israel, you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. <sup>4</sup>Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

A promise that God will look after us. He doesn't forget us because we are old. He realises we can't do what we used to do, and He makes allowances for that, because He created us like that!

We can of course look forward to the wonderful time when we will no longer be limited by age or anything physical.

But in the meantime, the Bible encourages us to make the most of this special season of our lives, enjoying our grandchildren, using our experience to help younger people as we can, but above all continuing to walk with our God as we have done for many years, putting Him first in everything, serving as His Senior Saints, and growing older God's Way!