

Ministry to the Aging

• Lesson One •

The Value of Aging

1. The purpose of all life
2. Challenges the aging may face in carrying out this purpose
3. Blessings for carrying out this purpose that come with age

Worship

In Psalm 71 the psalmist appeals to God for help as his enemies seek to take advantage of him in his advancing years. He finds comfort in the love, salvation, and strength of his LORD.

Read selected verses of Psalm 71

A: In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.

B: Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me.

A: For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth.

B: From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you.

A: Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

B: My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure.

A: I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.

B: Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

A: Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

B: My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you-- I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long.

Prayer: O Lord, as we study your Word, pour out on us your Holy Spirit. Lead us to treasure the gifts you give to all of your people and open our eyes to ways we may encourage others. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction

When you are a child you are asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" As you grow older the question changes to, "What are you going to do after high school/college?" Some time later you are asked, "What are you going to do when you retire?" But that seems to be when the forward-looking questions stop. No one is asked, "What are going to do when you turn 87?" In fact we may be more likely to hear, "You don't look a day over 72." Which we understand as a compliment but it seems to imply that "looking" 87 would somehow involve an undertaker.

We prepare people for work, for marriage, for children, and for financing their retirement. All these things keep us busy and all have a purpose that fills our future vision. We keep so busy that

when we finally slow down it may feel as we no longer have a purpose. What is the purpose of being 87? Many do not have a ready answer to this question, but God does. Today let's remind ourselves what God's purpose for life is and how we can carry it out for all the days our Lord keeps us on this earth.

Studying God's Word

The purpose of life on earth

Read Ecclesiastes 12:1,6,7

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"--6 Remember him--before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or 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.

1. What does Solomon encourage all people to do?
2. What does it mean to "remember your creator"?

Read Romans 12:1-2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3. Once we know our creator also as our Savior what is the natural response for a Christian?
4. How does God equip us to carry this out? (1 Corinthians 12:7)

For Discussion

Paul speaks about being transformed so that we no longer conform to the pattern of this world. What is the "pattern of this world" in regards to the value of the aging?

How do the above passages and others "transform" this kind of thinking?

Our purpose in this world is to come to faith in Jesus and then serve him with all the abilities he gives us. This purpose will not change with age. What will change is the opportunities we have to use them

Challenges the aging will face in carrying out this purpose **Read Ecclesiastes**

12:1-5

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 men rise up at the sound of birds,
but all their songs grow faint;
5 when men are afraid of heights
and of dangers in the streets;
when the almond tree blossoms
and the grasshopper drags himself along
and desire no longer is stirred.
Then man goes to his eternal home
and mourners go about the streets.

1. What problems that may arrive with age does Solomon describe?
2. How may these items challenge the aging as they seek to carry out the purpose God has given them?

Read Psalm 138:8

The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.

3. What confidence does David express? What is the basis of his confidence?

For Discussion

Marie, 71, loves her Lord. She has always served the Lord at church. She sang with the Choir, was a Bible class leader, and served on the Ladies Circle. She also served him in her personal life. But three years ago Marie had a stroke that placed her in a wheelchair. Her body no longer functions at the same level as her mind. She sees other, younger, healthier women called to their eternal home. She now questions why God keeps her in this world instead of taking her to heaven. What do you say to Marie? How can you help her see a purpose for life?

Every stage of life offers challenges when it comes to serving the Lord. Young Christians may lack experience, knowledge, or opportunity. Adults may struggle with being pulled in different directions. But the aging face challenges that are very often all their own. They struggle against the world's perception and at times their own diminishing physical ability. Yet our God enables every stage of life to serve in spite of our weaknesses.

Blessings for carrying out this purpose that come with age **Read Job 12:12**
Is not wisdom

found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?

1. What valuable resource is found among older adults? How could this resource be put to good use?

Read Genesis 32:9-10

9 Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.

2. What blessings had come to Jacob as he grew older?

Read Psalm 37:25

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

3. Why does this statement of David carry more weight in his old age than if a young man spoke it?
4. Can you list any other blessings that come with old age that can be put to use in God's kingdom?

For Discussion

Martin has served on the church council in the past and served faithfully. However when the nominating committee approached him about being on the ballot this year he hesitated. He explained that now that he is in his seventies he feels that he has less to offer on the council than a man in his thirties would. You are on the nominating committee. How can you help Martin to see the positive value of his age instead of focusing only on the negative?

"Gray hair is a crown of splendor" Proverbs 16:31. If America felt this way Grecian Formula would be out of business. If God's Church on earth fails to see this truth we force the body of Christ to function without many of the members God has blessed with abilities. This would be a despising of the gifts God gives to his Church. Learn from the wisdom, experience, and knowledge with which God has gifted the aging!