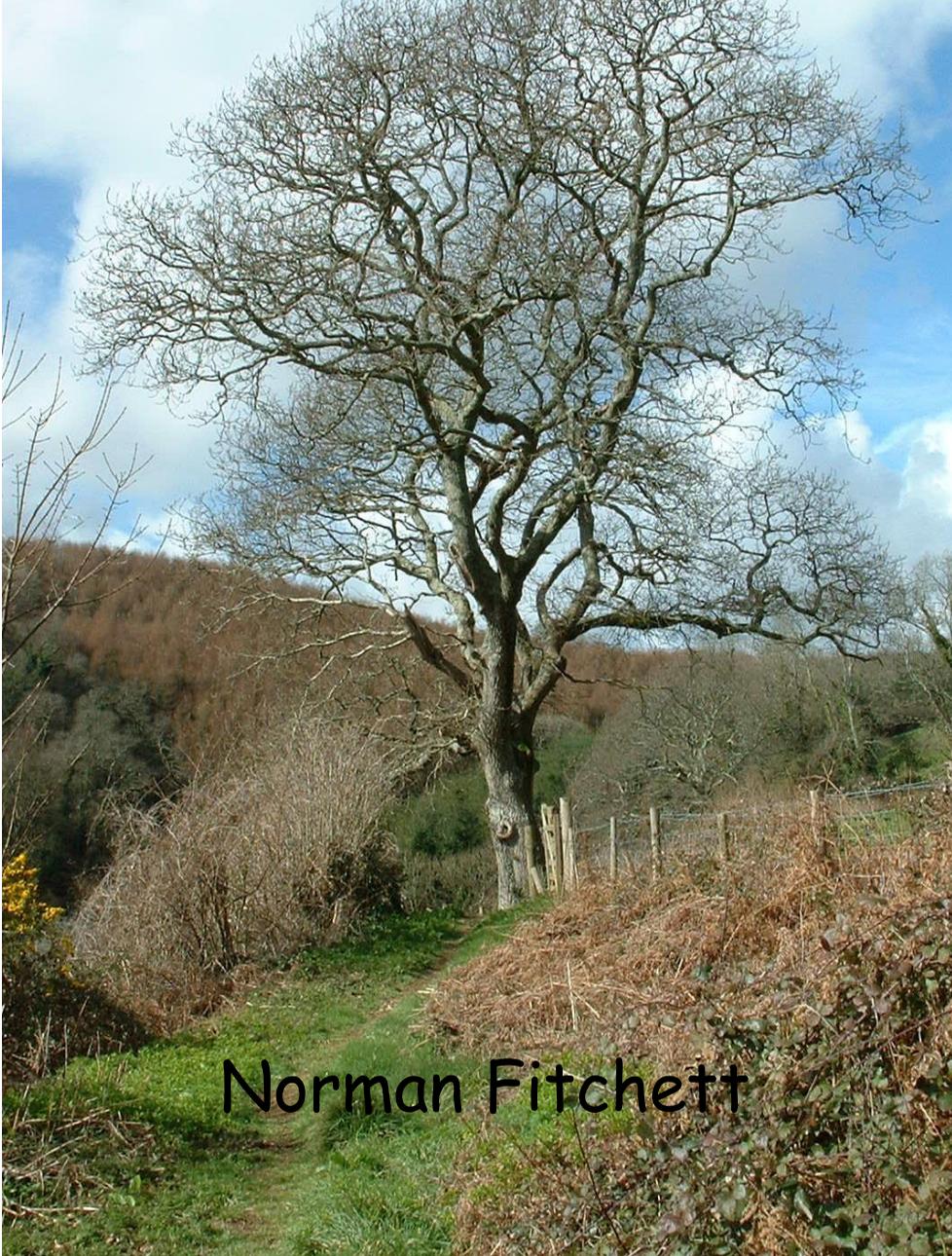


Even When I am Old



Norman Fitchett

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
PREFACE	3
CHAPTER 1- A Good Place to Start.....	5
CHAPTER 2 - Same painter – Different portraits	9
CHAPTER 3 - What is it really like?	20
CHAPTER 4 - Golden Opportunities	27
CHAPTER 5 - Guilt – the Space Between.....	33
CHAPTER 6 - Gratitude- a Stranger’s thankfulness	40
CHAPTER 7 - Growth –from Adult to Child & Back	44
CHAPTER 8 - Grace - The Salvation of the Lord	51
CHAPTER 9 - Kissed by the King	58
CHAPTER 10 - Part of the Family	64
CHAPTER 11 - Take Care of Yourself	70
CHAPTER 12 - Helping Hands.....	76
EPILOGUE - Moment of Truth.....	80
SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS	84

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks to:

Dalesman Publishing Ltd (Skipton) for permission to use the delightful "Old Amos" cartoons and captions, the work of Roland Lindup.

Paul Fitchett for the cover photograph

Leprosy Mission International for permission to use "Easy to say, Lord" from "Music on the Wind" by Eddie Askew.

Lion Publishing PLC for permission to use the poem "Youth and Age" by Myron J. Taylor and "All I hoped For" attributed to a Confederate soldier, both published in "The Gift of Years" by Marion Stroud.

.....
The poem by Francis Thompson "In No Strange Land" is from the "New Oxford Book of English Verse".

The list of Positive Actions is from the Christadelphian Care Group publication "Supporting the Aged: A Care Resource".

The poem "We are Survivors" (slightly amended) is from a teatowel.

Except for the prayer "Do not look forward" by Francis de Sales, the other prayers and poems are written by unknown authors . . . their words still beautiful and appropriate.

"We must not weep at an End". This poem by David Burrows is from "Inner Journey, Outer Journey" by James Roose Evans published by Darton, Longman and Todd (Bleddfa Trust Centre for Caring and the Arts)

.....
My sincere and loving appreciation :-

to Sue Collinge who so carefully, sympathetically and efficiently deciphered my untidy manuscript and transformed it into this book which you now hold in your hands . . .

and especially to my wife, Margaret, for her encouragement and her invariably sensible suggestions which have made this book so much better than it otherwise would have been.

FOREWORD

We first met Brother Norman Fitchett about twelve years ago at a Care Group Fellowship weekend in Derbyshire. We were touched by his gentleness, compassion and warmth.

Even When I am Old reflects Norman's personality, experiences and vision of hope in the Lord. Other books could be written with a different focus and different content but this is a personal account of what it is like to grow old. It reaches out to the reader with humour, poignancy, sadness, joy, thankfulness, comfort and above all, hope.

It's the sort of book that can be read from cover to cover or dipped into. Its message is both spiritual and practical.

Norman's enthusiasm and love of the Scriptures has encouraged and guided us in our lives. We have learnt much and grown spiritually through our friendship with him. As you read this book, may you too be encouraged by his words.

Andrew and Sue Collinge

June 2004

PREFACE

The trouble with writing a book about old age is that you have to be old to write it and, by then you may be too old to write it! Thankfully, though now old, I have been able to write it and you are holding the proof in your hands. This is an authentic, eyewitness account of what life is like when you are old.

Although anyone has my permission to read it, this book is written especially for you, my elderly contemporaries, those of you who have travelled the same road at the same time, who have shared with me some of the same experiences, the same changes, most likely the same thoughts and certainly the same hopes and purposes. This book is for us. It is about being old, its privileges, blessings, challenges and cares. It explores what we do, what we say and what sort of people we are.

It is a personal view but I hope that what I have written may touch your soul and re-ignite your spirit. Though all of an age we are not all the same. Nevertheless, I hope that you will be able to identify with the thoughts expressed, that you will be encouraged to reflect upon your own life, not to uncover some dark secrets, but to enable you to understand and appreciate how important you are to God, to other people and to yourself.

When you read it, you may feel that you are “hearing” rather than “reading”, that the words seem “spoken” rather than “written”. You would be right, because some of the chapters are based on notes prepared for Sunday exhortations. Should you then feel “spoken to” then that is because I am speaking to myself. One’s own life contains a rich resource for exhortational topics.

My profound wish is that what you read here may encourage you to have a deeper sense of wonder and gratitude for the precious gift of the New Life that, by God’s grace, you are still living; that you might find here

some inspiration to strengthen your faith, to give you renewed hope and a feeling of positive well being and, above all, find a new incentive to continue “to grow in the grace and knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Amen

Norman Fitchett

CHAPTER 1

A Good Place to Start

How do you start to write a book about being old? This was the question that taxed my brain for a long time. No doubt that was because my brain is as old as I am – if not older! At last I have come to the conclusion that the best place to start is the beginning – that is, my beginning: date of birth, early life and things like that.

Childhood

My beginning was in the Nightingale Nursing Home in Derby on 6th January 1924. I grew up in a small terraced house which had a range that was black-leaded every week; a deal-topped table (scrubbed every week); a small back yard and garden; a tasselled fringe above the fire-place; a rag rug on the floor and an atmosphere of happiness, security and love.



We were not very well off and depended a lot on home-grown produce from my father's allotment. When I went with him the best times for me were either lighting bonfires or drawing water out of the well.

"Aye, lad, Ah'm 99 today. One more year an' Ah shall be a centipede".

Childhood was simple, uncomplicated and routine. One week's holiday a year at Dawlish or Penmaenmawr was eagerly anticipated and immensely enjoyed. The sun

shone every day – I think! Being a railway employee, my father was entitled to free travel for the family; otherwise it is most likely that our holidays would have been less exotic! How times have changed!

The words of this poem may capture a little of what we have all lived through.

We are Survivors

(for those born before 1940)

*We were born before television,
before penicillin, polio shots,
frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, videos.
We were before radar, credit cards, split atoms,
laser beams and ballpoint pens,
Before dishwashers, tumble driers, electric blankets,
air conditioners, drip-dry clothes . . .
and before man walked on the moon.
We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in Lent,
a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat.
We existed before house husbands,
computer dating,
and 'sheltered accommodation' was where
you waited for a bus.
We never heard of FM radio, tape decks,
artificial hearts, word processors,
or young men wearing earrings.
For us time-sharing meant togetherness,
a chip was a piece of wood or fried potato,
hardware meant nuts and bolts
and software wasn't a word.
We who were born before 1940 must be
a hardy bunch
when you think of the way in which*

*the world has changed
and the adjustments we have had to make.
No wonder there is a generation gap today!*

Anon

Memories

My father, mother and sister all belonged to the Christadelphian Meeting in Derby and so my young life was bound up with the people there. When I was eleven my father died at the age of fifty-six; so I am now old enough for my father to have been my son!

Those were the days before life-saving drugs such as penicillin and antibiotics, and so life expectancy was much shorter than it is now. Life teaches us that tragedies have to be met with fortitude and courage; life has to go on. There was school, the eleven plus exam and the vexing question as to whether we would be able to afford school uniform and books. But there was very strong community support. I still remember with gratitude the help that was given to us by the members of Derby ecclesia almost seventy years ago.

In those days, too, there was a kind of neighbourhood-spirit abroad, a sense of belonging among those who lived in the same street, and this also alleviated the pain of loss and the need for change. This is all that needs to be said now. Enough, that is, except to say that I was baptised into the Saving Name of Jesus on 23rd October 1940, a date of great significance for me and a year of momentous events for our country and for Europe.

Different People, Different Stories

Perhaps these personal reminiscences of mine might trigger your own memories. Find time to ponder. Reflect again on your beginnings, your joys, your sorrows. Every one of us has a different story, a different life.

Sadly, we hear today of people, now in their older years,

whose lives have been damaged by bad experiences in childhood and youth. Many have to try to shut out memories of the past because they are too painful to bear.

All of us will recall events that changed our lives whether for good or for ill and even now, when we are older, the effects, the consequences are still with us. “The child is father of the man” (Wordsworth) and a sense of well-being in childhood can form a sound foundation on which to build a life.

All of us are unique individuals, all bearing the marks of the past, all influenced by many years of sunshine and rain, calm and storm. Some call it the “rich tapestry of life”, even though the colours may have faded and the edges are fraying a bit.

Well, that’s made a start! Sufficient for now to say that when we carefully consider the NOW, we are bound to think of the past and, maybe, ponder the future – but more of that later. We are all very familiar with ourselves, we usually know ourselves quite well. The next step is to look at something else we know a lot about – The Bible.

CHAPTER 2

Same painter – Different portraits

1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

Eccl 12:1-8 (KJV)

Perhaps you find that Ecclesiastes is a very negative and depressing book to read, especially all those references to vanity and the meaninglessness of life. Often it seems to say that life is not worth living and it all ends in despair anyway. We have to try to understand it by trying to understand who wrote it, and why it was written: by a disillusioned king who looked at the world in general and at his own world in particular – a world to

him of pointless endeavour.

The Physical Portrait

The first thing to note about this portrait of old age in chapter 12 is that it is, primarily, an exhortation to the young. It begins in the previous chapter – chapter 11 verse 9.

Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things, God will bring you to judgement.

Eccl.11:9 (NIV)

Two things for the young to do, says Solomon: keep your eyes on the future and thus see the importance of remembering your Creator now – before those “days of trouble come”.

The *Speaker’s Commentary* states:

In one word, godliness acquired as a habit in youth, is recommended as the proper compensation for the natural cessation of youthful happiness which makes the days of old age more or less evil, more evil in proportion as there is less of godliness in the heart and less evil where there is more godliness.

Or, in a much less erudite form: old age is like everything else – if you want to make a success of it start when you are young. So we consider this sad, melancholic, slightly humorous but beautifully drawn portrait of old age. The imagery is delightful but enigmatic, the descriptions realistic, evocative rather than definitive.

The Bleak Picture

It is not uncommon in the Scriptures to represent the human body by the figure of a house. At its most depressing we see an old house, with its doors, windows, furniture, pitchers, cisterns, fountains and

crumbling steps and pathways. Sometimes the doors are open, sometimes closed, windows that give light may be darkened less the fierce heat of the sun be too much to bear. However, the overriding theme is of decay and dereliction, where functions are impaired, the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken at the wheel.

In this house there is no longer music, laughter and singing. Even the song of a bird seems an intrusion. The thought of enjoying a good meal seems unattractive and “desire” for all the good things in life “is no longer stirred”.

The Almond Tree

The only thing that flourishes is “the almond tree”. Here we see a glimpse of hope. Have you ever seen an almond tree in full blossom? See one against the backdrop of a green hill and a bright blue sky and you have seen something unforgettably beautiful. The portrait here is of white hair or the “hoary head” of old age. Its beauty is in its distinctiveness. I will say more about this later.

The poem ends with a reference to the Edenic edict “for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3.19); and a most remarkable statement about our destiny; “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”. You may not agree with me but I like to think of that word “and” as meaning “but”. Yes, your body returns to dust “but” your spirit returns to God who gave it. No doubt again a reference to the creation of man (see Genesis 2 v 7) where God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”. I cannot help but wonder what God would do with your “breath”, but I do know what He will do with your “spirit” - your life.

Of Value to God

When we die God does not forget us. In simple words He will take our lives into His loving and caring hands. The Bible tells us about names being written in God’s

Book of Remembrance. Our life is so very important to Him, more valuable than the life of many sparrows and He will preserve it carefully, because one day, He is going to give it back to us.

Here is a portrait painted in wonderful detail, even if with an enigmatic brush and palette, but it is a portrait of physical man. It describes old age in physical terms, external things, the flesh, but there is no doubt about its truth, both for the time it was written and for now.

In spite of all the blessings of modern medicine, hip and knee replacements, heart and lung transplants, dialysis and sophisticated treatments for asthma, heart disease and the like, the portrait remains true to life. Man is mortal and even though seeming miracles are performed and life expectancy is so much greater than in my father's day, nevertheless "man (still) goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets". (v.5)

Fortunately, by the grace of God, this is not the only Biblical portrait of old age. The other is not to do with our physical being but with something much more important.

Made in God's Image

Human beings are much more than bodies. We are moral, intellectual, emotional and spiritual beings who possess character, personality and temperament. We are capable of thought and memory, we can reason, solve problems and make decisions. Our hearts can be touched or moved with feelings of love or hate, thankfulness or ingratitude; we can be kind, patient and contented or we can be cruel, impatient and irritable. We can know what friendship is and appreciate the tender care of others.

We are God's children, members of His family and He loves us as a Father. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), made "in the image (likeness) of God" (Gen. 1:27). If God does something "fearfully", He does it reverently, spends time on it, treasures it and cares for it. "Praise the Lord, O my soul – all my inmost

being praise His holy name” (Psalm 103:1).

The Spiritual Portrait

Just as we have been looking at the physical ‘outside’ portrait, now we must take a look at the ‘inside’ one. Psalm 71 (ascribed to David) is another good starting point.

For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.⁶ By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.

7 I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge.⁸ Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.

9 Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. 10 For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together,¹¹ Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.¹² O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

Psalm 71:5-12 (KJV)

David's life had not always been that of a “sweet psalmist”, gently pasturing his flock on a sunny hillside. His life had been torn and tested many times and that might have led some people to think that God was no longer with him. But that is not true. Just as in his youth he had been saved from the “paw of the lion” and the “paw of the bear” (1 Sam 17:37), so now he expresses his complete confidence in God. Now that he is old his trust in God is very important to him.

Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds. Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

Ps 71:17-18 (NIV)

Here we have an inspirational personal testimony of faith and hope in old age. What are the things that keep him going and that he still wishes to do?

He wants to . . .

- . . . remember the days of his youth (v 5).
- . . . declare God's splendour (glory) (v 8).
- . . . go on trusting in and relying on God (v 9).
- . . . always have hope (v 14).
- . . . speak about the righteousness and salvation of God (v 15).
- . . . proclaim God's mighty acts (v 16).

Finally, he testifies to his deep conviction about resurrection, the restoration of his life and the increase of his honour.

*Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter,
you will restore my life again; from the depths of the
earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my
honour, and comfort me once again.*

Ps71:20-21(NIV)

Confidence in God

We would be making a serious mistake to idealise old age and pretend that these verses are true of everyone. Not all of us would react to difficulties as David did; not all of us would claim a faith as strong, a lifelong confidence in God. Yet God accepts us as we are. He recognises us according to our own personal, individual character and our own unique circumstances. Nevertheless, it is a great idea to emulate the thoughts and feelings of such a man as David – refined in the cauldron of trouble, temptation and trial, failure and success.

*Nevertheless I am continually with thee;
 thou dost hold my right hand.
 Thou dost guide me with thy counsel,
 and afterwards thou wilt receive me to glory.
 Whom have I in heaven but thee?
 And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides
 thee.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for
 ever.*

Psalm 73:23-26 (RSV)

Each day the psalmist can put his hand into the hand of God and go forward feeling safe and secure; each day he is led by God's counsel; each day, in spite of the fact that his "flesh and heart fail", he feels new strength and purpose. His body may be old and frail - his spirit is young and strong. Our first portrait is ugly - the second is beautiful. The body is temporal - the spirit is eternal. "No spring or summer has such grace/As I have seen in one Autumnal face" (John Donne). Or, as a German proverb puts it: "An old person loved is a winter with flowers". The body may be in Autumn or Winter – the spirit in Spring and Summer.

Steadfast Love

Before we leave the book of Psalms we must look at two most beautiful and irresistible texts referring to old age. The first is sad with a joyful ending and is found in Psalm 90.

*For all our days pass away under thy wrath,
 our years come to an end like a sigh.
 The years of our life are threescore and ten,
 or even by reason of strength fourscore (v 9-10) . . .
 so teach us to number our days
 that we may get a heart of wisdom. (v12) . . .*

*Satisfy us in the morning with thy steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Make us glad as many days as thou hast afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.
Let thy work be manifest to thy servants,
and thy glorious power to their children.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish thou the work of our hands upon us,
yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

Psalm 90: 14-17 (RSV)

This is said to be a prayer of Moses the man of God, and perhaps we may see in the Psalm allusions to the life of Moses and the history of God's dealings with the Israelites. You will see that our life span is contrasted with that of God. "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night" (v 4). Old age brings "trouble and sorrow", but the psalmist sees this against the overwhelming compassion of God for His servants (v 13). His "unfailing love" brings "joy and gladness". The Psalm ends with a gracious prayer for the continuing blessing of God upon our labours in spite of the "trouble" and "sorrow".

The word rendered "favour" (v 17 RSV) is not nearly so captivating and evocative as the word "beauty" in the AV. Just imagine that. Reflect for a moment on the glory of that prayer, and on its answer – for the "beauty" of the Lord "will rest upon us". The second passage is in Psalm 92.

*The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the LORD,
they flourish in the courts of our God.
They still bring forth fruit in old age,
they are ever full of sap and green,*

*to show that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.*

Psalm 92:12-15 (RSV)

Calke Abbey Park, near Derby, is famous, not only for its old house and collection of artefacts but also for its many centuries' old oak trees. They are stunted and



*“It doesn’t matter
where we live as
long as we live
where we are.”*

broken, many of them hollow, gnarled, twisted and contorted into incredible shapes; yet, still, year by year, they burst out with new fresh growth, and later they produce hundreds of acorns. In spite of great age they still stay fresh and green testifying once again to the miraculous gift of life inherent in all living things.

Spiritual Fruit

The oak, the vine, the olive and all fruit producing trees have their harvest seasons. It is not so with the fruit the Psalmist is talking about. Spiritual fruits are not seasonal. They do not ripen nor are they harvested at one particular time in life. They can be gathered anytime. The Apostle Paul’s list of spiritual fruit in Galatians 5: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control” come to maturity at any point in our lives. They are “planted in the house of the Lord” and “they flourish in the courts of our God”. (Psalm 92:12). This is where we are. The Almighty God is the Husbandman and our lives

are in His cultivating hands; so let Him go on working with us.

Somewhat reluctantly, we must leave the Psalms with their compelling and attractive figurative language and portraits of old age, and move forward to take a closer look at the real thing – our own personal old age.

A Seventeenth Century Nun's Prayer

*Lord, Thou knowest better than I myself know
that I am growing older and will someday be old.
Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking
I must say something on every subject
and on every occasion.*

*Release me from the craving to straighten out
everybody's affairs.
Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not
bossy.
With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity
not to use it all,
but Thou knowest, O Lord,
that I want a few friends at the end.*

*Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details;
give me wings to get to the point.
Seal my lips on my aches and pains.
They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them
is becoming sweeter as the days go by.*

*I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of
others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.
I dare not ask for an improved memory,
but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness
when my memory seems to clash
with the memories of others.
Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally
I may be mistaken.*

*Give me the ability to see good things
in unexpected places,
and talents in unexpected people.
And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.
Amen*

CHAPTER 3

What is it really like?

Here are some things we older folk say:

Now where did I put my glasses?

We mustn't forget to collect the prescriptions.

I must make a note if I want to remember.

Now – what did I come here for?

That's the third thing I've broken today.

Are you going to take your stick?

Of course, there are other sayings, which compensate for these like:

Do you remember the wonderful day we spent with the children at . . . ?

Yes, I used to think that, but I understand it better now.

Thank you for your phone call. I feel better already.

If I'd been at work I couldn't have done that.

Yes, that was wonderful to be looked after so well.

Here we are then, on the threshold of thinking about negatives and positives, failures and successes, privations and privileges which come upon us from every side and which need to be held in balance with each another.

There are times, especially in the dark Winter days, when the negative aspects of old age seem to dominate. The winter of life can be bleak. In the Spring we feel differently. Share a seat in the sun with a dear friend, a cup of coffee and a chat and the world is a different

place.

Frustrations

Let's start by thinking about the negatives, the frustrations and the failures. Let's hear the bad news first. For example, the jobs we were able to do quite easily – put up shelves, knit a jumper, put in a new electric socket or make a fruit cake are either impossible or at least very difficult. Failing eyesight and arthritic hands make us clumsy and careless.

Everything takes longer than it used to. It's so frustrating, and even humiliating to accept defeat.

Then there are the bad days when we don't feel too well or we wonder how we are going to cope with the day that lies before us. This reminds me that it helps to have a morning prayer to say – and make a regular practice of saying it. Here is an anonymous prayer, which you may like to use or commit to memory.



“You know when you're getting old when you have to rest before taking a nap.”

Morning Prayer

*Thank you LORD for this brand new day.
Give me the wisdom to see its possibilities,
and the strength to face its challenges
and the grace to be open to its promise.*

*Give me a heart of love to do a favour,
to speak a kindness, to soothe a hurt,
to celebrate a joy, share a sorrow,
or in some small way
give myself in love to another
in Your Name. Amen*

Sometimes, if we are very poorly then all that we may be able to manage is a simple request for God to be near to us during the day.

Frustration is only one of the many negative aspects of old age. Often we can deal with the minor irritations and setbacks, such as our inability to perform tasks, with a shrug of the shoulders or a smile. But sometimes we have to face up to more serious matters. Hopefully, not all of these issues and aspects of old age will apply to you!

The Blessing of Friends

Sometimes, being tired, lonely, unwell, miserable, afraid and undervalued are feelings that can be very painful to bear especially if there is no-one who can reach out a hand of comfort, speak a word to encourage, share the sadness and, as the saying goes “take you out of yourself”. We know only too well how these things can cause distress and even times of depression. It is often said “Don’t worry. The Lord is with you at all times”. The words may be true but it is so easy to forget them or even doubt them when we feel low. We need careful handling.

God is indeed with us but we need His comforting hand, encouraging word, strength and compassion in the shape of another person; not only love and sympathy but acceptance, and above all, understanding. The best medicine in these circumstances is the

presence of another human being: one who cares and understands, who loves and reflects something of the grace of God in his/her life and who is willing to share it with you. If such friends are there then you are blessed indeed.

But if they are not there . . . what then? God is there, we believe that, but what if this time in your life becomes a test of faith, patience and courage? Everyone has to find their own way, and this way depends on circumstances, health, personal strengths and individual needs. There are no rules, and advice isn't appropriate for everyone. Somewhere, from deep within yourself, you will find the way.

If you are naturally an outward looking person you may be able to reach out and give what you can to other people. They may need you as much as you need them. Reflect on the fact that you are important to God, He sent Jesus to live and die for you. You are also important to others and to yourself. Your life is still of greater value than "many sparrows". One of the greatest things in life is to feel wanted and needed. In helping others you will be helped.



"It doesn't matter how old you are but how you are old!"

But if you are not a naturally outward person and you have tried, without success to befriend someone in your ecclesia, you can make the telephone your friend. The Christadelphian Care Group operates a telephone service especially for you. If you contact them (the

telephone number is in Chapter 12 of this book) you can be put in touch with a “listening ear”. Just talking in confidence to an understanding and sympathetic listener is a fine healing therapy. It may lighten your heart and turn your night into day.

Living alone

For a variety of reasons, for example, your family has grown up and left home or you may have suffered bereavement, you may find yourself having to live alone. But living alone must not be confused with loneliness; it's quite possible to be lonely in a crowd and this can be a painful experience. How is it that some people find it possible to be alone but not lonely? Most likely it is a mixture of temperament and personal qualities combined with a great deal of faith and trust that makes them so. Perhaps they have recognised the truth in the ancient prayer:

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can
and the Wisdom to know the difference.*

Dependence on God

The human spirit has many resources. It is incredible to see cheerfulness in the face of adversity, patience in pain and serene acceptance of intolerable difficulties. Courage and fortitude, endurance and perseverance preserve us from the fate of despair and capitulation. We cannot separate these qualities from the devotion and commitment we have towards God.

We believe in Him. We trust in Him and we depend upon Him. We confess that the strength we have is His strength; the comfort we have is His comfort; the life we live is His life.

Loss

The things we have looked at in this chapter are mainly about the negative, painful things in our lives. Some of them are hard to bear and they are made harder still when we suffer the tragic experience of loss. We have hinted already about some aspects of loss: mobility, sight, hearing, skills, memory, appetite etc, but undoubtedly the most significant and devastating loss is the falling asleep of a lifelong wife or husband. This can be the time when all the negative elements of life become even more evident. A numbing grief doesn't help the problems that are already there. The bewilderment and sense of emptiness put normal irritations and minor frustrations in the shade.

We are told that sorrow and open grief are essential elements in the process of healing. I do not know. I just have to believe that when Paul wrote that "we do not grieve as the rest of men", it means that our sorrow, real though it is, is partnered by a hope – "We believe that Jesus died and rose again . . . God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess.4:13-14 NIV). Even if your husband or wife did not share your faith, perhaps these beautiful words by David Burrows may help to lift your heart.

*We must not weep at an end
for there is no end
We are not what we were
We cannot lose what we have gained
We have met,
We have touched each other with smiles
Exchanged unknown emotions
We have embraced without shame
We have met for a reason
A brief interlude in time
And so we part, the purpose done.*

David Burrows

Don't Lose Heart

Near Dinas Mawddwy on the A470 Welshpool to Dolgellau road, is a very long, steep hill. It takes you to a high point over the Cambrian Mountains.

To a modern car the hill presents little challenge, but 40 years or so ago, to a small Standard 8 car loaded with family and holiday paraphernalia high on the roof rack, Dinas Mawddwy was a formidable obstacle – to both car and driver! Formidable because, when both driver and car were exhausted, the road became steeper and steeper. Would it cope? Would it manage? We could really do with a gentle push.

With patience, careful handling, gentle coaxing and a few words of encouragement, we slowly made it to the top. . . and . . . what a view there was stretching out before us – a beautiful panoramic view of the way ahead. All the effort was worthwhile. There were lots of new experiences, many new things to enjoy.

Therefore:

. . . we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.

2 Cor. 4:16 (NIV)

CHAPTER 4

Golden Opportunities

*The hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found
in the way of righteousness. Prov.16:31 (NKJ)*

Do you realise how important we older persons are?
Do you know that if we were not here the economy of
the country might collapse?

Think of all the tens of thousands of people we keep in
regular employment: doctors, nurses, pharmacists,
opticians, dentists, chiropractors, osteopaths, herbalists
and the like – to say
nothing of the thousands
employed to process our
old age pensions, fuel
allowances and free TV
licences. So let's not feel
that we have no place in
society any more. We
are a vital element in it!



*“If I'd known I was going to get
to this age, I'd have looked after
myself better”.*

Active Opportunities

It's not all that long ago
when life expectancy
was much shorter than it is
now so retirement these
days is encouraged to be
an active, productive time.

Now older brethren and sisters are able to take an
active part in ecclesial life or involve themselves in Bible
Mission or Campaign work.

Many people (say over 65) have good mobility, good
memory and good dexterity. However, others do not.

Not everyone can take advantage of the many pursuits and interests that are designed with older people in mind. Often those who are blessed with good health and opportunity remember those less fortunate and find ways of supporting them.

Using our Skills

In spite of all the statutory organisations that exist for our care, there is still a great need for volunteers - to use their cars as taxis, look after Charity shops, be a 'Friend' of a hospital or a school governor. Possibilities are endless and voluntary work is much needed and appreciated. "An active mind in an active body", it is said, "is the complete answer to coping with old age", and if we are able to make it so, then our community can be a community of opportunity.



"When you feel too old to do it - do it!"

It is no doubt "superfluous for me to write to you" (as the Apostle Paul once said) because so much of the work in the brotherhood is already being performed by older brethren and sisters. Some of our ecclesial caring or welfare teams depend upon retired members who are still able to travel and visit those who need care. Some of our speakers, presidents, arranging brethren and secretaries are seventy plus. There are ecclesial halls, which are maintained, redecorated and sometimes rebuilt by older members who have retained and can still use their skills.

More Opportunities

The Christadelphian Care Group, in its series, *Caring Matters*, has published a resource book for carers, *Supporting the Aged*, and with permission, I am able to

quote from that useful book here. It reminds carers that “old brothers and sisters can do certain things, and be certain kinds of people”.

For example, we can:

- *feel thankful for life*
- *feel appreciative of family and friends*
- *feel content, serene*
- *draw on long experiences, speak words of wisdom, share skills*
- *be examples to younger people*
- *display courage and faith*
- *display love and patience*
- *look forward in hope and expectation*
- *be encouraging to others*
- *be fun and have time for people*
- *witness to our faith*
- *find time for Bible study, meditation and prayer*
- *find time for the pursuit of hobbies and interests*
- *explore new opportunities*
- *enjoy memories*
- *keep growing spiritually and draw closer to God*

Perhaps we could use this as a checklist and see if we can fit in anywhere – not everywhere - but somewhere.

In Harmony

Let it not be thought for one moment that I am advocating or even suggesting that all senior Christadelphians ought to embark on what we might term ‘outside’ activities, merely to say that whatever we do with the last quarter of our lives can be done without compromising our faith. In our mature years, as well as in our earlier years, all things need to be done in harmony with our beliefs and with our conscience. It is important at any age to live out the truths that we have espoused in any place, at any time, in any circumstance and among any people. Thus our work and our leisure,

within or without the ecclesia, is where Christ is glorified and His Name honoured.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Col.3 :17 (NIV)

From independence to dependence

Thus far in this chapter, it has been assumed that you are sound of mind and strong of limb and that your bones are in good shape. However, sadly, we are not all so greatly blessed.

As we grow older the time will come when we can no longer even consider the possibility of 'doing' things at all. We may not even be able to make our own choices. Independence may have to give way to dependence, and, at last perhaps, we have to admit that our active days are over.



"The nearest some of us get to gardening is digging up the past."

Sometimes others have to make decisions for us. We may resist their suggestions; we may resent their intrusion; we may not agree with the arrangements they make.

Facing change

Many of you will know how difficult it has been to make others 'see sense' (as we say), or to acknowledge that this or that is the only solution. Many of you will know how relieved we are when a loved one consents to having full time nursing care, to go into sheltered

housing, to buy a smaller house, or be willing to have help in the home.

You may think that I am saying we old people can be difficult especially if we are not feeling too well. You are right – I am. But I am also suggesting that we can make it easier for ourselves and our carers (family in particular) if we are prepared to accept ‘the gift of their concern’, and graciously surrender to their counsel.

Perhaps such problems as these will never arise! The trouble is, we are humans, and old humans cannot always be reasonable or rational. Maybe we should commit ourselves more to prayer and the bountiful provision of God. Let us, then, prepare ourselves for the eventualities of old age and make it clear in good time what our expectations and wishes are.

Am I saying that old people can be co-operative and gracious? Yes I am.

Despite reflections upon our ‘awkwardness’ and desire for independence, this section has been mainly about the positive aspects of our more mature years. But there are other factors to consider. I call these Faith Factors. In the next chapters we will take a look at four Faith Factors, four Gs : Guilt, Gratitude, Growth and Grace.

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow – the same Everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day.

Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then, put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations and say continually,

“The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusted in Him and I am helped”.

(St Francis de Sales)

CHAPTER 5

Guilt – the Space Between

I once drove my car along a road which was dedicated to buses and cyclists only. Imagine the dreadful humiliation, the shame, the smallness, when the magistrate asked the question, “Do you plead guilty or not guilty?” “Guilty!” The very word itself has an ugly ring to it, but the feeling is even worse. Guilt is like pain, we would do well without it; but, like pain, it has a cause, a reason. It is also similar to pain because if we need to be free from pain, we have to get to the root of the cause. So with our feelings of guilt, before we apply the remedies, we need to examine the cause.

Regrets

It is not uncommon for us when we are older, to have some regrets, some recollection of indiscretions, some sense of failure, of wrong words spoken, wrong thoughts thought, wrong deeds done which stubbornly insist on staying with us in spite of our desire to rid ourselves of them. In most cases it will be true that, at the time, we did what we considered to be right. We prayed to God to ask Him to make the decision for us. We could not possibly see into the future. It is only with hindsight that we can see the other options which may have been available.

“If only I had not said that, thought that or did that. If only I had been more thoughtful, considerate and sensitive”. Should we have these regrets then let us have more faith in the cleansing power of forgiveness. Throughout our life, if we have been conscious of giving offence to God, or someone else, and when we have sought forgiveness, the matter has been resolved. True relationships have been restored. There is no need to go on living with a sense of guilt. Christ died to take

away our sin.

Whilst pain is due to the malfunction of the body, guilt is caused by the malfunction of the soul. I'm using the word "soul" as meaning the character, the personality, the real you "all that is within me". We call it "human nature" and human nature is prone to these kinds of malfunctions and indiscretions – sin. That's a simple enough word which, sadly today, has lost its meaning. Where are we then in regard to our 'sins and faults of youth'? Answer: Forgiven!

Forgiveness

As already suggested, forgiveness is one of the most remarkable miracles in the Bible. Take, for example, a miracle at Capernaum (Mark 2). Everyone could see that the paralysed man was no longer paralysed and the change in him was wonderful, joyful and obvious; but no-one could see with their eyes the other greater, more radical, more significant change – the cleansing of his heart and mind.

The great thing is that this double miracle is happening to us and in the same order. Here is part of the story:

. . .they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, they lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven".

Mark 2:44-5 (NIV)

Suppose you had seen this man – paralysed– helpless, hopeless, totally dependent, a pitiful, pathetic sight, your first thought might have been, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if he could be healed "or " . . . better if he was out of his misery".

Healing

Jesus might have felt the same; he had seen the faith of the man's friends and he knew that he had the power to

give new life to those helpless and useless bones. But, this is not his first priority. No doubt Jesus knew that sin was the reason for his condition. Perhaps the man himself knew that. In any case it was commonly accepted that suffering was caused by sin! No! His first concern was that healing must begin inside – in the heart, the mind, the soul. “Son, your sins are forgiven you”. Guilt is taken away, a feeling of great calm and confidence enters; he is free at last from the burden of sin. He felt within himself that he really had been forgiven.

Then there is a space – a space for others to argue, to debate, to accuse – but for this man a space to rejoice, to be thankful, to feel renewed, to marvel at this miracle of forgiveness which has come to him through the love and power of Jesus. Then there is the second phase in this process of recreation:

Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk?” But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .

He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home”. He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this”.

Mark 2: 9-12 (NIV)

It was like a resurrection. This weak, helpless body, paralysed and useless, was recharged with new energy, new power, new possibilities, new experience; a complete transformation, total healing of soul and body.

The Space Between

Think of that ‘space between’, for this is where we all are now. We have come (or been brought) to Jesus in faith. We have received the love and power of Jesus; baptism

into his Name has cleansed us from our sins; the burden of guilt has been lifted from us. The amazing thing is that this miracle of forgiveness is not restricted to one event which took place many years ago when we were baptized; it is an eternal, ever present miracle in our lives.

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Heb 10:12-14 (NIV)

Here we are then, in the ‘space between’; “our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb.10:22)]; our sins forgiven, healed inside, rejoicing in our redemption, and in faith waiting for the second part of the miracle to take place when one day, all the ills and the pain, the weaknesses and the frailties of life are gone for:

. . .our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Phil 3:20-21 (NIV)

Forgiving others

In this space between - that is the length of time between our spiritual birth and our physical resurrection, although we rejoice in the grace of God’s forgiveness, we do well not to forget that, in the same way that God forgave us, freely and generously, so now we must forgive others. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray and then offers his own commentary:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not

forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matt 6: 14-15 (NIV)

Here Jesus is not saying that it is advisable, suitable or appropriate to forgive others, but that it is of critical importance to do so. If we do not, we stand condemned. The parable of the unmerciful, unforgiving servant is a simple story but the lessons are profound and uncompromising. You can read it in Matthew 18 verses 21-35.

"If you smile when things go wrong is it because you've thought of someone to blame it on?"



You may recall times in your life when, in a true spirit of sadness and repentance, you have sought the forgiveness of someone whom you may have unwittingly offended – and it hasn't worked. Your approach has not been accepted. Sadly, this sometimes happens and it can leave very deep wounds. Unfortunately, it can be as hard to accept forgiveness as it is to offer it, and it is a blessed state indeed when a forgiving spirit is graciously recognised. Then, relationships are restored; old animosities are removed; a troubled mind finds peace.

It's Never Too Late

Is it ever too late to bury grudges and cancel debts? No! It may be, of course, that the person or persons we have

offended are no longer here and we are left with a sense of regret that we didn't act earlier. But, even if that is so, deep down in our hearts we can be truly repentant; we can have a deep spirit of repentance within and still have the opportunity to seek God's forgiveness for our own lack of forgiveness. There is, therefore, a way to 'feel better'. A spirit of contrition is always humbling but it is much to be preferred than hardness of heart and pride.

So, however old we may be and however long we may have been troubled, it's not too late. Love drives out fear. Conscience can be cleansed. We need not go on being worried by the lingering, persistent thought of our own transgressions. I suppose it's a case of submission to the gentle, persuasive influence of a Christ-like spirit within.

There will still be times when we fail, still times when we need to come before the throne of grace and ask for the forgiveness of our sins – and what a privilege and a blessing that is – but deep down we know that there is no need to fear; no need to be anxious about the future; no need for the reproaches and the "if onlys" – only time to praise God in thankfulness for what He has already done for us and to look forward with joyful hope to what He has in store. Amen.

An Evening Prayer

*O Lord, thank you for the blessings of this day.
I am sorry if I have said, thought, or done
anything which is not in keeping
with your Truth and your purpose with me.*

*I ask for your saving grace
through your Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord,
the forgiveness of my sins
and for your providential loving care.*

*May I find your peace this night
in quietness of mind
and tranquillity of heart
and rise renewed to a new day.
In the Name of Jesus.*

Amen

CHAPTER 6

Gratitude - a Stranger's thankfulness

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:11-19 (NIV)

They stood afar off. That's how it had to be. Here was a pathetic, forlorn, hopeless group of people; outcasts from society with no rights, no privileges, probably with no friends and no homes. "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Remembering to say "Thank you"

Who is it who calls Jesus by name? Only the blind, those with evil spirits and these lepers. They know their Saviour when they see him. Suddenly the truth dawns – this is the man who can save. "Master!", a word of utmost veneration and respect. "Master, have pity on us". So they obey the command of Jesus and as they go to the priests they are cleansed.

Their awful stains, scars and wounds disappear and

they watch with joy and amazement as new life sweeps over and into their bodies, and either enraptured or forgetful they fail to give thanks to their Saviour – except one, a Samaritan, a stranger, who came back to Jesus and throwing himself down at his feet, praised God in a loud voice, and thanked him. Can you just imagine the gentle smile on Jesus' face as he heard the fervour of his praise and knew the thankfulness in his heart?

Can you remember those very early days when your parents and teachers reminded you to say “Thank you?”, or the days when you, as a parent taught the same lesson to your children? We taught them not only to say “Thank you” but to *be* thankful, even for the smallest blessing. Now, when we are older, we hope that we can still have that spirit of thankfulness in ourselves.



“You understand life if you look at it backwards and live it forwards.”

Expressing Gratitude

Thankfulness is courteous, polite, unselfish, appreciative. Thankfulness brings contentment to ourselves and builds good relationships with others. At the risk of ‘sermonising’, it is important that we remember to express our gratitude for the basic, simple things of life: our food, home, warmth, clothing and the presence of caring and loving people. If we are faithful in that which is least we will be faithful in that which is much (Luke 16.10). And so our thankfulness for the ordinary, mundane and temporary things of life will cultivate a deeper gratitude for what Jesus, the Saviour, has done for us.

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thess 5: 16-18 (NIV)

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

1Tim 4: 4-5 (NIV)

When the Samaritan leper came to Jesus, he came to him as a stranger, an outcast from “the commonwealth of Israel”. He rejoiced in his healing; he enthusiastically proclaimed his joy and his faith, and he fell on his knees with thankfulness. He would never, in his whole life, forget that moment. It is quite possible that when Jesus said to him “Was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Rise and go, your faith has made you well”, he was speaking in Aramaic, the common language of the day. When Luke wrote this gospel he wrote it in Greek and the word he used for thanksgiving was *eucharisto* – the word for thankfulness.

Sunday by Sunday we come in faith and belief to remember that our life has been changed, that we are no longer strangers but we have been cleansed from our sins and now belong to the people of God. We may come with some feelings of regret, that we have sometimes forgotten to say “Thank you”, that we have taken things and people for granted. So let us come before Him, not only with hymns of thankfulness on our lips, but with humble thankfulness in our hearts, and Jesus will gently smile on us and say – “Your faith has made you well”.

THANKSGIVING

*I thank Thee, God, that I have lived in this great world
and known its many joys;
The song of birds, the strong, sweet scent of hay
And cooling breezes in the secret dusk,
The flaming sunsets at the close of day,
Hills, and the lonely, heather-covered moors,
Music at night, and moonlight on the sea,
The beat of waves upon the rocky shore
And wild, white spray, flung high in ecstasy;
The faithful eyes of dogs, and treasured books,
The love of kin and fellowship of friends,
And all that makes life dear and beautiful.*

*I thank Thee, too, that there has come to me
A little sorrow and, sometimes, defeat,
A little heartache and the loneliness
That comes with parting, and the word "Goodbye",
Dawn breaking after dreary hours of pain,
When I discovered that night's gloom must yield
And morning light breaks through to me again.*

*Because of these and other blessings poured
Unasked upon my wondering head,
Because I know that there is yet to come
An even richer and more glorious life,
And most of all, because Thine only Son
Once sacrificed life's loveliness for me –
I thank Thee, God, that I have lived.*

Anon

CHAPTER 7

Growth – from Adult to Child and Back

It is said that the only constant thing today is change. When we are old we do not always welcome change. We are happier with the ways that are familiar. We are pounds, shillings and pence; yards, feet and inches, pounds and ounces people. We often find ourselves saying things like “That bus ride used to cost me tuppence ha’penny and now it’s 78p. (Good thing we have a Senior Citizen’s Travel Pass!). Those of our brethren and sisters who still have the ‘disadvantage’ of working for their living will tell you that the first sentence above is an understatement. In every field of human activity policies, methods, systems are all in the process of change and the results are often chaotic.



“I’ve always been too busy to grow old.”

Whilst these kinds of changes in travel, communications, technology and the like are symptomatic of the modern urge for progress, other changes are much more serious: attitudes, for example. Things that a few years ago would have made us hold up our hands in dismay have become acceptable norms in our society. Attitudes to money, authority, discipline, marriage, entertainment and so on, do not fit in easily with a spiritually based morality and with rules for holy living which we find in the Bible.

Many of us not only feel that changes in our modern

world are difficult to cope with, but find them offensive to our thoughts and disturbing to conscience. If you are labelled as an “old-fashioned fuddy-duddy,” then so be it. If being “fuddy-duddy” means standing firm in what you believe to be right, refusing to accept or admit into your life ideas, images and impressions which contaminate the spirit then “Long live the fuddy-duddies!”

Necessary Changes

However, whilst we may look askance at the way the world is, we have to admit that some changes are for the well-being of all. Many of us oldies would not be here to read this book without modern skills and services. One can only marvel at the incredible things that surgeons can now do with hearts, lungs, kidneys, knees, ears and eyes- and they are doing it better all the time. And how would many of us manage without our car or telephone?



Having said all this, and looked at change from rather a negative standpoint, we have to admit that, just as in physical life, change is necessary and desirable, so it is in our spiritual life. We are born, we grow into childhood, youth, middle years and then – I was going to say “old age” but I prefer “maturity”: a process, a growth, a constant change, a transformation which doesn’t stop unless, by sudden mischance, we meet accident or tragedy.

*“Experience is summat tha’
niver has ‘till just after tha’
needs it!”*

Becoming Childlike

One day, some time ago, you became a child again - a child of God, “born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5), brought up on the “milk of the word of God” (1 Cor.3:2) and rejoicing in the nurturing of the Love of the Father and by other members of the Family of God. Gradually you grew in knowledge and understanding, learning, listening, reading, discussing and even perhaps enjoying the privilege of teaching others – children or adults. On another day, a long time ago:

[Jesus] called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:2-4 (NIV)

The disciples seemed preoccupied with a notion of greatness and Jesus, by a simple analogy, tenderly but powerfully demonstrates the error in their thinking. Jesus here commends humility, in the sense of reliance, dependence, lowliness and submission. These attributes of humility are some of the most intrinsic, positive and endearing qualities in a child. They are the opposite of presumption, aggressiveness and self-importance. This is a strong message for the children of God, however young or old we may be. Childlikeness is not to be confused with childishness, and Christ like child-likeness is one of the most attractive attributes of old age.

Growth and Change

However, the sub-title of this section suggests that there is a time of growth – a time of change- from adult to child and back, because, just as the teaching of the Bible insists upon childlike qualities of humility, gentleness, innocence and trust, so it insists upon a

growth to adulthood: to maturity, fullness, perfect manhood or womanhood. Whilst such is true of all times in our life, it is especially important that it is evident when we are old.

To become like little children, as Jesus tells us, is a challenging paradox. The Apostle Paul reiterates this when he says in Ephesians chapter 4:

. . . grace has been given (v7). . . to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Eph 4: 7, 12-16 (NIV)

And again, he writes:

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

1 Cor. 14.20 (NIV)

And in his challenging chapter on love in 1 Corinthians, he says:

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

1 Cor. 13:11 (NIV)

Christ and his Father

When Jesus used the word “Abba” it was much more than a term of endearment. It was the declaration of a unique, special relationship, that of The Son with The Father. Their relationship was the very foundation of all that he did, all that he was. In times of trouble he called upon his Father for strength and encouragement. In times of joy or success he shone with childlike pleasure and spontaneous thankfulness. He was “holy, harmless and undefiled” (Heb. 7:26). He had discovered the strength of childlike trust. He knew what it meant to reach out his hand to the hand of his Father.

But, he was also totally in control of himself and Lord of every situation, confident, assured, a tower of strength to the weak; comforter of the sorrowing; a friend to the lonely and unwanted; a teacher sent with authority, unequalled in knowledge and understanding and full of wisdom.

On the cross, his childhood and his manhood blend into one. He submitted with childlike trust to the will of his Father and, at the same time, reached the very heights of manhood; mature, complete, the perfect offering for your sins and mine.

It is a truth that growth is a sign of life. Change is taking place all around us, in our world and in our ecclesias: new people with new ideas; new ideas waiting for new people to embrace them. It is inevitable that sometimes we view both with distaste, “Change for the sake of change”, we may say. But let us use the wisdom and the graciousness that comes with old age to view such changes not as threats but as opportunities; not a cause for despair but of thankfulness that Truth is still alive, and that there is always more to learn, to experience, to wonder at; and to praise God for. When we have reached this point, we will be grown up children indeed.

Youth and age are not dates in time, but states of mind.

Our duty is not to add years to our lives,

But to add life to our years . . .

Time may wrinkle the skin, but worry, doubt, hate

And the loss of ideals wrinkle the soul.

Fears, not years, bow the head . . .

Whether we are seventy or seventeen,

A sense of the wonder of life keeps us young.

Myron J. Taylor

If the changes taking place around us are difficult to cope with, leaving us confused and bewildered, we do well to remember that God is unchanging and our lives are built on the sure and steadfast foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ALL I HOPED FOR

*I asked God for strength
that I might achieve;
I was made weak,
that I might learn to humbly obey.
I asked for health,
that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity
that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty,
that I might be wise.
I asked for power,
that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness,
that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things,
that I might enjoy life;
I was given life,
that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for
– but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself,
my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all people, most richly blessed.*

Attributed to a Confederate soldier during the American Civil War.

CHAPTER 8

Grace - The Salvation of the Lord

It's quite amazing how some things stick in the mind. The following (by no means accurate passage) was in a Foreword to a book about time and the history of mankind. It must have been fifty years ago when I read it and the author's name escapes me. It went something like this:

In the far north there is a great rock. It is a thousand miles long and a thousand miles high. Every thousand years a small bird visits this rock to sharpen its beak. When the rock is thus worn away, one day of eternity will have passed.

By God's good grace we believe that our three score years and ten (tiny though it is in comparison with eternity) is significant, important and valuable to God. Not only is it impossible to grasp the idea of eternity, it is sometimes difficult to understand our own small life span. For example, what we think happened three years ago, may have happened five years ago. "I can hardly believe a year has passed since I last saw you", we say. In growing older time grows smaller.

Childhood blended with age

Earlier in this book I referred to childhood holidays in Dawlish – the place where the trains of the old GWR ran between the cliffs and the sea. Recently I visited Dawlish again and stood and watched the trains hurtle by just as I did when I was a child (steam locomotives in those days!) and somehow the time between collapsed. It became as yesterday, like a watch in the night, and it had gone. It was as though I was waiting, waiting to be a child again, waiting to grow up; a strange experience, difficult to describe. But incidents like these are also very wonderful : the cliffs, the sea, the sky are the same,

and in some way I was the same, looking back to the past, living again a childhood experience but blended with age.



*“What a lot of time we
waste
trying to get there in
a hurry!”*

Different kinds of Waiting

Since becoming believers in the Gospel much of our life, if not all of it, consists in waiting . . . waiting for the future to happen . . . waiting for Jesus to come. We all appreciate that this “waiting” is not just passive, but active, an on-going preparation, so that “our labour is not in vain in the Lord”. Jesus will welcome those who “occupy” until he comes; who produce fruit; run the race; exhibit patience, kindness and love; whose faith remains steadfast; who witness to his Name in righteousness and holiness.

It is possible that bodily frailty prevents us from any kind of physical activity. We may be dependent on others for our daily care, but, provided that our minds are clear, we can mentally prepare ourselves to meet Jesus. Prayer is one of the most powerful elements in preparation. We can pray for ourselves and for others and by our example of faithful trust and thankfulness we can shed sunlight into the lives of those who are close to us. This is a different kind of waiting . . . a waiting on God. It is a

kind of waiting which is really a “resting” on God, and having an abounding trust in His benevolent providence.

Some of us have been waiting in this way for many, many years, praying daily that Jesus may come soon, that he might invite us to share the glory and happiness of his Kingdom, and bless the world with peace. It is good that our expectations should not weaken, but as we grow older perhaps we may ask the question, “I wonder if I might die before Jesus comes?” We do not know the answer to that question, but it is important that we think positively, for example:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

Luke 12.32 (NIV)

. . . whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3.16 (NIV)

If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Rom. 14.8 (NIV)

All of us have been reminded many times that should we die before Jesus comes, then our next conscious moment will be when we see him face to face. We “comfort one another with these words”.

Continuing to wait

Many years ago, there was one man who was promised that he would not die until he had seen Jesus Christ:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy

Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Luke 2:25-32 (NIV)

Simeon

By inference, Simeon was an old man, ("he would not die"); he was "righteous" and "devout". Righteousness is an inward condition of the heart and mind. It describes a person of sound morality and integrity. Righteousness is also about right living, godliness, gentleness, right behaviour in the sight of God and man. Simeon was also "devout", a man who knew something of true worship, devotion and adoration. He was a holy man, living a life influenced by the spirit of God. "The holy Spirit was upon him"; "It had been revealed to him by the Spirit" and "he was moved by the Spirit". Simeon was a Spirit led man. He waited thus on God as he waited for God. No doubt he had experienced disappointment and sadness in his life; no doubt he had known suffering and temptation or even doubt. But, he had never given up, never stopped waiting.

Just imagine his joy, the way his eyes would shine with a new light as he takes the infant Jesus in his arms, lifts him up so that all in the Temple could see : "this child is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel". What a moment of supreme happiness and fulfilment. This was something worth waiting for – and what an astonishing prophetic statement that was: – "consolation", the coming alongside of God to His

people Israel – and a light to all nations; to pierce the darkness of ignorance and indifference and bring salvation to all people.

When the child Jesus grew to be a man, he would also take a child in his arms and by so doing teach the world great lessons of humility and love. In him you can wait, secure and safe. There is no need to be afraid. None of us, however old we might be, is too old to know this.

Anna

There is more to this remarkable story. Consider Anna the prophetess who was also looking for the redemption of her people.

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36-38 (NIV).

Did Anna and Simeon know each other, share a common hope, comfort and encourage one another? A nice thought.

Anna was a woman of 84 years, a prophetess, a teacher with a message; one who waited on and for her Lord. No doubt fragile and infirm, no longer able to do all the active things she used to do or would like to do, but having a mind alert to the gracious promises of God, a heart devoted by continued fasting and prayer (two of the most demanding of godly virtues).

Miraculously it seems she is nearby, sharing in this

precious moment, listening to Simeon's inspired words, looking with wonder at the child, sharing the drama with Joseph and Mary, aware of the crowds in the Temple, but most of all knowing for certain that this new born child is the "hope of all the years". "Christ the Saviour is born". Perhaps we can imagine her kneeling there on the Temple floor, praising and thanking God for this revelation of His Son, and then, with new found strength in her body, new resolve in her heart, she goes in search of her friends, those in the city who were "looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem".

If you have ever taken a new born child in your arms then you will know something of the wonder and miracle of a new birth, the hopes and promises for the future: the blessing and privileges of the gift of life.

Some years ago, we were reborn; we have known the meaning of salvation and redemption, the blessings of deliverance from sin; the forgiveness of our sins. Still we wait for the Christ to come. Let us be devout and righteous people, living our lives in the sanctifying atmosphere of God's spiritual house, giving ourselves to a life of prayerful service, rejecting as unworthy all those things which offend as "we look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3.12 NIV).

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

John 17:3 (NIV)

A PRAYER FOR OLD AGE

*O Father of Mercies and God of all Comfort,
our only help in time of need.*

*I come unto thee for help
to meet the trials of advancing years.*

*Look graciously upon me
and the more the outward man decays,
strengthen me the more continually with Thy Grace
in the inner man.*

*Give me courage and patience
to bear the infirmities, privations,
sorrows and loneliness of old age.
Help me fight successfully its temptations
to be exacting, selfish, unreasonable,
irritable and complaining.*

*Preserve my mental faculties unimpaired to the end,
keep my heart and affections warm,
so that I may never fail to sympathise with joys,
sorrows and interests of others
and to be deeply grateful
for the love and forbearance of those around me.*

*And so fit and prepare me against the hour of death
that I may be able to face it fearlessly,
trusting in Thy promise to be with me
as I pass through the Dark Valley,
so that I may at last be received into Thy everlasting
Kingdom,*

*through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour.*

Amen

anon

CHAPTER 9

Kissed by the King

Sometimes lives of faithful men and women are held up as examples. Even bad examples can be salutary. Good examples can be daunting. However, we are reminded in the Bible that “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come” (2 Cor.10:11), or, on a more positive and encouraging note, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor.11:1).

Generosity of Spirit

In the Bible there are many good examples from the lives of older people. There is one which is quite irresistible. It is the story of three men, one of them eighty years old, who provided for the needs of those in distress. Their names were Shobi, Makir and Barzillai, all men of substance. A little Biblical research will reward you with more information about the first two men, but we want to focus on Barzillai, an example for all time and for all people who wish to show generosity of spirit and give what they can to alleviate the needs of many in our world today.

Our story begins in 2 Samuel 15. Absalom, son of David, had rebelled against his father and led his troops against the city of Jerusalem. “Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem “Come, we must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword (chapter 15v 14) So, “the king set out with all the people”. The matter was urgent. Lives were at stake. There was no time to gather food or possessions. The enemy was bent on destruction and the people were frightened,

bewildered, hungry and thirsty, and they fled into the desert country beyond the city.

When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."

2 Sam 17:27-29 (NIV).

Eventually the rebellion was crushed. Absalom died at the hand of Joab, the commander of David's army, and David and his people began their triumphal march back into the city. Then followed a time of assessment, a time to sort out enemies from friends, the faithful from the traitors, those to be punished and those to be rewarded. Among those who came back with David was Barzillai, the Gileadite.

Now Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. The king said to Barzillai, "Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you."

2 Sam 19:32-33 (NIV).

Devotion and Loyalty

Although he was a man of wealth, Barzillai was a humble man having a childlike devotion and loyalty towards David. He was content; he had no wish to be a burden to anyone. The comforts of the King's court held no attraction for him: "Let your servant return that I may die in my own town, near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is my servant Kimham. Let him cross

over with my lord the king”.

He must have had a great sense of responsibility and gave David his whole-hearted support. Aware of the blessings he had received he is bountiful in his giving, generous and unselfish, even at eighty years of age still making a contribution towards serving others. Kimham, his servant, no doubt would have had mixed feelings, attracted perhaps by the prospect of security and status in the palace of the king, on the other hand reluctant to leave the service of his master. Was this, then, a final act of generosity on the part of Barzillai?

Can you imagine how David’s heart would warm towards this man? “Anything you desire from me I will do for you”. The King kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing. There is no need for me to underline the lessons contained in this beautiful story, or stress the need for application. Here the kiss is a token of love and friendship. Sometimes a kiss is empty and hypocritical but here it represents a deep, personal, intimate demonstration of heartfelt thankfulness for the kindness shown to him. Spontaneous and with a full meaning a kiss can say far more than any words – it brings total and joyful welcome and the blessing of the king.

Spiritual Qualities

It is quite remarkable how much some of our older brethren and sisters are still able to do and, more importantly, still able to be. There are 80 and 90 year olds in our Family who, by their very presence among us, by their indomitable spirit, cheerfulness in the face of adversity and regular attendance at our Meetings are truly great examples to us all. You may be one of them.

Such people endear themselves to us all and we admire their courage and faith. If you are able to visit one of these mentally and spiritually alive people, you will come away uplifted and refreshed. Your visit may have been of help to them, but you have gained as well.

Sometimes I have talked to brethren and sisters who feel despondent about themselves and express regret that they are no longer able to do the things they used to do. They feel ashamed of their negative thinking and, in extreme cases, they may feel guilty for feeling as they do. This may even lead to the belief that God is displeased with them. "If only I was more content with my lot. If only I could be more trusting, then God would smile upon me again". Sadly, such a downward spiral of thinking is not uncommon. Try to remember that God is not unaccustomed to helping those who feel that they should be better than they are. It was precisely because He saw despair and emptiness in the human soul that He sent Jesus to bring in a "new and lively hope" and a feeling of self-worth [being valued by him].

Recollect the things that you have been able to do in the past, especially what you did for others. Remember the motives that lay behind your actions, the sacrifices you were prepared to make. You may think that these were small and insignificant; but life is made up of small, insignificant things which together make a vital contribution to the Lord's work:

*'Who sweeps a room as for Thy Law
makes that and the action fine'.*

or, as the hymn so beautifully puts it:

*'A work of lowly love to do
for Him on whom I wait'.*

(Hymn 137 in the Christadelphian Hymn Book)

The Love of God touches us not in our strengths so much as in our weaknesses; not so much when we feel self-confident, but when we feel bereft and life is hard. Pray that the Lord will open your heart to receive His gracious forgiveness so that any dark and empty spaces in your life may be filled with His Light and Fullness.

*Easy to say, Lord,
"Count your blessings"
And on a good day
when Spring is in the air,
horizon sunshine clear,
and everything's gone right,
my spirit wakes,
stretches its arms to joy.
It's easy then,
The alleluias tumble out of me so fast
My feet trip over them.*

*But come the day
when cold winds blow
and things go wrong,
relationships and circumstances
warp and dislocate,
they soon outweigh the good.*

*And, in the Winter of my discontent
- to steal a phrase -
there seems much less to count.
The balance changes
and the joy's subdued,
shadowed by cloud.
Have patience with me Lord
And blame ingratitude on indigestion,
Something I ate.*

*Help me to repaint the landscape
of my life in light.
Mix me warm colours
to replace the dark.
Remind me gently,
gently, Lord - I feel a little fragile –
that all's not lost.
There's still a sun behind the clouds
and seen or unseen
your love remains
and that's a blessing
I can count on all the time.*

Eddie Askew: from "Music on the Wind"

CHAPTER 10

Part of the Family

Nowadays elderly brethren and sisters often make up the majority in the ecclesia. This is especially sad when, some years ago, that same ecclesia may have had a thriving Sunday School and an active Youth Group, and young brethren and sisters too.

It is not appropriate here to discuss the various reasons that are advanced to explain this situation. Radical changes have taken place in our society in the last twenty or thirty years and many of them are not helpful to a spiritual lifestyle. Some of these unhelpful influences may have penetrated our ecclesial world.

An Influence for Good

Rather than discuss this in detail, it is a more beneficial exercise to consider our own role and the ways in which we see ourselves. After all, there are a lot of us elderly folk about. And a large number of like-minded, dedicated people, even though they may be old, can have an inspiring effect upon others. This can be our role.

Fortunately some ecclesias do have a number of young people, so we must consider how we older ones relate to them. We are very much creatures “of our age”, brought up in a world, a society and probably in an ecclesia where things were very different from what they are today. It is desirable that we retain the values and standards that governed our lives in the past so long as they do not stand in the way of understanding others’ needs, including those of the younger generation. It is a denial of all our principles to be antagonistic, repressive, or even distant and unapproachable.

Outside Influences

Young members, or potential members of our ecclesias have pressures and issues to face which we older ones, and perhaps our own children, did not have to face. The culture of the world does not sit easily with the customs of our Faith. Attitudes to marriage, sex, money, dress, music and leisure, promoted by the Media are not conducive to furthering Christian ideals. Those of us who were parents fifty years ago must sometimes wonder how today's parents cope in this new age of 'Enlightenment'. It looks pretty dark to us!



*"If you can tell
the difference
between good
advice and bad
advice you don't
need advice."*

We will hardly succeed in forming good relationships with the young and help them to grow spiritually, if we withdraw ourselves into a cocoon of indifference. We will have a better chance of success if we try to show a friendly and genuine interest. We should not always expect a positive response; it may be as difficult for the young to understand us as it is for us to understand them, but we may have to make the first move.

Building Rapport

It is good to see a rapport between old and young. Sometimes it comes about quite naturally and

spontaneously, and lasting and meaningful relationships are formed. Although we may not quite know where to begin, nevertheless we have a responsibility to our young people. If they can see in our lives evidence of a living faith; if they perceive that the religious life is transforming and worthwhile; that being a Christadelphian does make a difference, then they will be more convinced that such a life is best for them.

Accepting new Ideas

The importance of growth and how you cannot have growth without change is mentioned elsewhere in this book, but we need to explore our attitudes a little more here.

We do not take kindly to change. Sometimes we feel concerned or even offended by what others are proposing. You will have been long enough in your ecclesia to be aware of the kind of situations that arise. Some proposals for change are nothing to do with crucial, fundamental issues that pose a threat to our doctrine or manner of life. Often they are small, relatively unimportant matters, but if not considered objectively in a spirit of brotherly love, they can be magnified out of all proportion, become big issues, and result in ecclesial ballots and the like. In this way the matter might be settled, but the damage has already been done; feelings have been hurt.

It is helpful and more Christ-like if we can put our own personal 'hobby horse' into the stable and keep it there, if only for the sake of peace and harmony. Perhaps we might be willing to accept a time of experimentation "Let's try it." "Let's see if it is better." "It can always be reviewed later". Many difficult situations might be eased if there is an attitude of reasonableness and gentleness.

It is sometimes the case that we older ones come up with excellent suggestions about change. Then we

might wonder how others can't see the sense in what we are saying. Funny old world!

Living a Principled Life

The life we are called upon to live is a principled life. That is to say, we must be sensible about less important issues, but be on our guard against change that actually contradicts the moral and spiritual imperatives which we have espoused.

Conscience is the crucial thing. It dictates the decisions we make and the actions we take. However, let us not mistake conscience for convenience and let us not allow our own preferences or prejudices to stand in the way of honest enquiry and prayerful debate.

As always the Bible can help us to understand how we should treat one another, whether young or old. Paul, by now an old man, writes to Titus, (a younger man) "my true son in our common faith". Tradition has it that Titus, who earlier had accompanied Paul on his journeys, showed particular administrative and leadership qualities, and because of this he eventually became a bishop of the church in Crete.

In a gracious, fatherly way Paul counsels him about the way in which he should regard the older members of the church, and what he should teach them. He lists the qualities that it is desirable to see in the old.

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands,

so that no-one will malign the word of God.

Titus 2:1-5 (NIV)

Paul's emphasis on the importance of teaching is typical. As he has been taught, so he has instructed others and these, in turn, must pass on the same teaching which is based on "sound doctrine". This includes all aspects of Christ-like thought, feelings and actions. As Titus is to be an example to others, those he teaches must likewise be examples.

Living Examples

It may not be possible for you now to teach or preach, take a Sunday School class or give talks on Sunday but all of us can, by our faith and love and the goodness of our lives, proclaim the righteousness of God.

Note the phrase "worthy of respect" (v2). This particular quality is applicable to all – men and women, old and young. The inference is that older brothers and sisters are to be "worthy of respect" because we are deserving of respect. "Worthy" means to be estimable, having merit, praiseworthy and deserving. A "worthy" person is someone who is distinctive and recognisable, someone to look up to and emulate.

It is not a case of receiving respect for what we have done, but for what we have let God do with us. It is only insofar as we allow the Spirit of God into our lives, that we can hope to be in any way deserving of respect. Look what Paul also says to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to

*redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself
a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

We have sometimes heard it said that older brothers and sisters are 'fathers' and 'mothers' to the young. As we have seen, this idea has a beautiful Biblical sound to it. The phrase invites us to reflect upon the attributes of fatherhood and motherhood that are desirable in a natural human family, and apply them to the spiritual divine family: attributes such as love, being trustworthy, reliable, wise, sympathetic and understanding. There is also the need for patience and self-control. And how useful a sense of humour can be!

We can sometimes admit that being spiritual fathers and mothers in God's family doesn't get easier as we get older. The image tends to tarnish a little with age and infirmity, but if we can get used to the idea that being old in the ecclesia is a position of privilege and pleasure, then we will rejoice that what we are is what we are meant to be!

CHAPTER 11

Take Care of Yourself

Physical exercise is good for you! Many of us today, even though we may be older, can still feel the pressure of responsibility. Stress and tension in mind and body need to be alleviated. So what do we do about this? How important is it for us to keep fit?

I think we would all agree that our bodies are important. A body that is as healthy as you or I can make it is the best home for a healthy mind and spirit.

So if you are able to take regular exercise, such as walking, swimming, jogging, playing bowls or golf, or even tennis if you are really fit, and if you do not allow these activities to make too great a demand on your time and money, then it can be very beneficial. It is your body, your health and your concern.

The Scriptural Perspective

Traditionally Christadelphians may have felt some guilt in pursuing such activities. Yet being in the company of others at least provides opportunities to witness to Christ. Conscience is the arbiter so a healthy conscience helps the right decisions to be made. What is the Scriptural perspective? Think, for example, of that very early “first and greatest commandment”:

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength .

Deut. 6v5 (NIV)

When Jesus quotes this (Matt.22v37), he adds “your mind”. This command embraces the whole of nature and being. The key words are “love” and “all”.

Love is the basis. Love motivates the mind, moves the heart, encourages the soul and provides energy to the body. The word strength in the quotation seems to me to be a synonym for body. This command makes a demand and that demand can only be met when *all* the mind, *all* the heart, *all* the soul, *all* the body are strong and healthy and in union with each other.

“The world’s biggest under- developed territory is inside your head.”

Once again, however, we must pause to remember that it is as possible to suffer from dis-ease of the mind, heart and soul as it is from disease of the body. We must be careful not to assume that all of us are filled with vibrant health in these aspects of our human personality. Perfect health equals salvation and because we are human, salvation is not our experience yet!



Active Christian Living

In the second epistle to Timothy, chapter 2, Paul uses four analogies as descriptive of the need for fitness and strength in successful Christian living:-

- *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus (v3NIV).*
- *Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules (v5NIV).*
- *. . . the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops (v6NIV).*
- *a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (v15NIV).*

Endurance, obedience, labour and integrity are indeed qualities which require the strength of all the heart, the soul, the mind and the body. Although the examples Paul gives may be more appropriate to younger people than ourselves, they do remind us forcibly of the demand for active, Christian living.

Everyday Tasks

All-round health may be rare, but very desirable, certainly worth aiming for. Strenuous activity may be beyond us now and we may feel that we get sufficient exercise in following the daily routine. A walk to the Library or Post Office may be all that we can manage. We devise our own patterns and rules for daily living. On some days we can do more, some days less. But this is good. Let us pace ourselves, be unhurried, do ordinary jobs without stress, sing a hymn whilst cleaning the car or polishing the furniture. Dignify and sanctify the common task with good humour and thankfulness.

Everyday God gives strength for the tasks ahead. When things go wrong – when it rains on the washing or the milk boils over - try to deal with the situation calmly. It's so easy to feel irritable and flustered when setbacks arise. Think of all the times when these things don't happen. So much of our life is ordinary and commonplace. We can but rarely launch out on great adventures for the Lord. The spectacular and the sensational are not for us. Sufficient that we can “help those in trouble” and “devote ourselves to all kinds of good deeds” (Paul to Timothy again).

Complementary Therapies

To return to the matter of caring for ourselves, today there is a whole range of complementary therapies from which to choose, if you should wish to do so. There is, for example, the well validated ‘Alexander Technique’ which is basically a series of gentle physical movements designed to correct bad posture thus allowing the body

to function efficiently, as nature intended it to do. This kind of therapy is only one of many other systems which are now popular, for example, Acupuncture, Aromatherapy, Homeopathy, Reflexology. Whilst it appears that such therapies are more acceptable to the general medical profession than they once were, it may not be advisable to embark on long or even short term courses without prior consultation with your doctor. Your medical history would determine whether or not any of these alternative therapies is appropriate for you.

Honouring Christ

Scripture makes it quite evident that a human being is a whole being. We have noted before that we possess intellect, emotions, a life that is unique and personal to ourselves and a body “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Paul asks us not to forget the importance of this particular personal bit of creation:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

The context is the proper use and the possible mis-use of the body.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body (v13).

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? (v15)

Christ is not honoured and the temple of our body (the whole person) is defiled if we elect to abuse, neglect or over indulge ourselves in any degrading way. Christ is honoured and the temple of our body undefiled when it is regulated by a conscience that works on the basis of our faith and allegiance to Christ and when the Spirit of God is in occupation.

Care for the Soul

Care for your body is important; the care of your soul is paramount. In this temple we pray, worship and serve; in this temple we find security and peace. Above all, in this temple we know the presence of the Lord. It is good to allow His Glory to fill it.

We have to find time for necessary daily physical activities but time also needs to be found for prayer in stillness and quietness. "A quiet time, a quiet place and a quiet mind" is a good recipe. Try to put aside some time each day for spiritual exercises. Tone up the muscles of the soul; persevere with the disciplines.

So many things clamour for our attention, titillate our eyes and our ears and these can so easily desensitise us. We can come to believe that "there is no harm in it" whilst we fall under the spell of, say, a television programme. The mind is amazingly versatile, capable of so much that is "noble and of good report", but it can easily become preoccupied, influenced by the triviality and tawdriness of a world that has no time for God. It's that conscience again and its application in the discipline of choice.

Some people keep a spiritual diary, a journal in which to write down not just what has been done each day, but what they have felt or what they have thought about and discovered. If you have someone to share these moments with you, you are blessed indeed. Look after yourself!

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thess. 5v23-24 (NIV)

*If our lives have become shallow,
Deepen them.
If our principles have become shabby,
Repair them.
If our ideals have become tarnished,
Restore them.
If our hopes have become faded,
Revive them.
If our loyalties have grown dim,
Brighten them.
If our values have become confused,
Clarify them.
If our purposes have become blurred,
Sharpen them.
If our horizons have become contracted,
Widen them.
If our hearts have become chilled
by indifference,
fear and disappointment,
Warm them with mercy, faith and love
For Jesus, for each other
and for ourselves.*

Anon

CHAPTER 12

Helping Hands

There is one certain thing about growing older – it never stops happening. So all of us have to face the unpleasant fact that, should Jesus not return in our lifetime, then we are probably going to need care of some kind. Can we do anything to make it easier for ourselves and for others?

There are, of course, the obvious practical things to do, like making your Will, or requesting a younger person in your family to sign an agreement (Continuing Power of Attorney) which will enable them to legally look after your affairs should you be no longer able to do so.

Personal wishes

It is as well that your relatives, close friends, or brethren and sisters know of your own personal wishes with regard to your future.

Do they know, for example, how you feel about entering a Care Home or Sheltered housing?

Do they know what your wishes are concerning your own funeral arrangements?

It's very tempting not to think about such sombre matters but we do have to think sensibly and lovingly about those who will be responsible for making all the necessary arrangements.

It is not easy to feel that others may have to make decisions for you, it's much more preferable if you can make your own choices, but you may have to trust that they will do their best for you.

Some of you who may be reading this book know

already what it is like to surrender your independence. Some of you may have had to give up your home, garden and life-style and make your home elsewhere. This is a very difficult choice to make and yet the fact that you are in a secure and caring environment can help you to feel thankful and appreciative of daily care. Growing old is not always nice, but it does have some compensations.

A Spirit of Acceptance

In difficult circumstances, when you are under stress of declining health and worried about the future, it is not easy to be co-operative and compliant. It is then that our human nature can assert itself just as it did in our younger days and we can become resistant and difficult, but if we can cultivate a way of thinking, a spirit of acceptance and patience, if we can be realistic, sensible and reasonable, graciously yielding to what might be unwelcome plans, then we will feel more relaxed and content and our anxious friends or relatives will bless us for our understanding.

There are those lovely verses in Philippians that gives us more than a glimpse of the attitude and mind of Paul, when he says:

. . . I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. . . . I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Phil 4:11-13 (NIV)

Even though we are old

Even though we are old it is not too late to cultivate the “meekness and gentleness of Christ”, to pray for others, to pray about ourselves; to try to be serene in mind, tranquil in spirit and above all, rest in the certain

knowledge that the LORD our God is gracious and compassionate, that He knows all about us, that He knows how we feel, and that He holds us safely in His Helping Hands.

*O Lord,
please give me the wisdom
and the trust
to hand my life over
to the care of others.
Please protect me
from my own unreasonableness
and the thought that I always know best.
May I learn to be content in mind,
gentle in spirit,
Patient in tribulation
and confident in giving my life
into your Hands.
Amen*

IN NO STRANGE LAND

*O WORLD invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!*

*Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air-
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?*

*Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumb'd conceiving soars!-
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our clay-shutter'd doors.*

*There angels keep their ancient places;-
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces.
That miss the many-splendoured thing.*

*But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;- and, upon thy sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.*

*Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry, - clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!*

Francis Thompson

Epilogue

Moment of Truth

It was the evening of a glorious day; the sun was sinking into the western sea. We stood, with many other visitors on the headland which is claimed to be the most westerly point of Europe. It is called Cabo da Roca, near Sintra.

As the sun swiftly sank, there descended upon us all a deep silence, and a great sense of . . . what was it now? . . . calm, wonder, awe, peace, happiness, sadness? It is hard to explain an experience that transcends words. It was, what I might call, an 'other world' experience, a moment of truth, an insight into, or a connection with a realm that is beyond our own. It was a special moment—a moment of pure love. But it was only for a moment, the feeling passed, the light was fading, night was coming. It was time to be on our way home.

I wonder if, in your life, you have had moments like this - times when the world that is above, beyond and different from this one is suddenly revealed to you. It can happen anytime and anywhere, in the country, in the city, in loneliness or in a crowd, perhaps in happiness or perhaps in pain, in silence, worship, prayer, music, study, meditation or in the presence of a dear friend.

Sometimes the realisation dawns gradually, sometimes splendidly with a sudden start but we are made aware of an invisible and eternal world, so much greater and so much more beautiful than our seen temporal world. You don't have to be a romantic, a mystic, a dreamer of dreams, it comes to us all; it is to us an intimation of eternity.

By God's grace you and I have not only caught momentary glimpses of this Kingdom of Heaven, we

have become related to it:-

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1John 3:2 (NIV)

and

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Cor. 4:16-18 (NIV)

and

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

1John 1:2 (NIV)

.....

A Final Note

In this book I have considered many aspects of being old, some of the topics practical, some moral or spiritual. It is inevitable that I have omitted to write about matters that may be especially important to you, but all the time I have been conscious of not writing just for you, but also for myself. The author is always the reader – so finally, I am going to ask you to do what I am going to try and do, that is spend some time every day to meditate upon these amazing and wonderful truths:

You and I have become a part of God's eternal world; or perhaps it is better to say, God has made us a part of His world. At different times and in different ways God has spoken to us; we have listened and obeyed, we have discarded the temporal and put on the eternal.

In spite of the challenges it has presented to us, our feelings of inadequacy and weakness in the face of the perfection of Jesus; our doubts, our anxieties and our needs – yes, in spite of all these, we would not have changed it for any other. This New Life is the Best Life, it is the True Life and the Only Life. It cannot be compared with any other. Godliness . . .

. . . has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come

(1 Tim 4:8 NIV)

In the days that remain to us let us be glad and rejoice, living a holy and godly life . . .

. . . as you look forward to the day of God, . . . but in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

2 Peter 3:12-13 (NIV)

This is the message I leave with you as you come to the end of this book. Thank you for reading it and may God's blessing be with you. Amen.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen

1 Tim 1:17 (NIV)

God

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Heb 4: 14-16 (NIV)

Jesus

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Eph 1:3 (NIV)

Us

Some Practical Suggestions

Here are some organisations that may be of help to you. Please check the ALS diary for up-to-date information on Christadelphian organisations.

Christadelphian Benevolent Fund

The Benevolent Fund helps brethren and sisters and/or their families struggling to make ends meet, by making cash grants or loans on a confidential basis. Applications may also be made for assistance with the cost of holidays or payment of Winter fuel bills. The normal channel for help is through the Recording Brother. Further information can be obtained from:

The Secretary (Brother Neville Moss)
27, Badger's Bank, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP2 9EN.
Tel: 01473 682269

Christadelphian Care Group

The Care Group (CCG) provides a confidential and caring service for anyone with a difficult personal problem by offering a "listening ear" and the opportunity to receive skilled support. As a community we are blessed with brothers and sisters who have a wide variety of professional expertise and others who have personal experience of particular problems. They are willing to use their knowledge and experience for those who may need help. The work of the CCG complements the work done in ecclesias. A prayer line service is also available. Further information can be obtained from:

Brother Andrew and Sister Sue Collinge,
12, Rosafeld Avenue, Halesowen,
West Midlands B62 9BU.
Tel: 0121 602 2810

Christadelphian Care Homes

The CNRC has recently merged with Bethany Guild to provide residential care, retirement accommodation and sheltered housing in Birmingham and other places in the UK. Further information can be obtained from:

The Administrator: Brother Graham L. Wright
CCH, 17, Sherbourne Road,
Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 6AD
Tel: 0121 683 8710

Age Concern

Age Concern operates a Care Line Service – a personal alarm system which enables you to call for emergency help at any hour of the day or night.

For information telephone 0800 77 22 66.

Your own Local Authority, City Council or Social Services may also operate a similar scheme. They may be able to help you with fitting smoke alarms, draught-proofing or ‘help rails’ in your house.

Other forms of care services, meals and home nursing and care can be arranged through your GP.

Help the Aged

You may obtain a list of advice leaflets about finance, housing, home safety and health from:

Help the Aged (Information Dept)
207-221, Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ

There is also a help line called “Senior Line” which offers free impartial and confidential help with enquiries regarding benefits, community care and housing.

Tel: 0808 800 6565 (9.00am – 4.00pm Mon-Fri).

NHS Direct

This is a confidential telephone access to qualified nurses and doctors for immediate advice on health matters. Tel: 0845 4647.

Legal

A solicitor will advise you about the making of a will that is legally appropriate and binding. He/she will also arrange for you to take out a Continuing Power of Attorney which will enable relatives or friends to take responsibility for your affairs should you be unable to do so.

Such precautions as these can make the administration of your affairs so much easier.

Learndirect

This is a free telephone help line which can give you information and advice about all aspects of learning for senior citizens.

Tel: 0800 100 900 (8.00am – 10.00pm daily).

Voluntary Services

Should you wish to do some kind of voluntary work, you can discover the locality/telephone number of your nearest Volunteer Bureau by telephoning the National Association of Volunteer Bureaux.

Tel: 0121 633 4555 (England), 029 2039 0477 (Wales) (9.00am – 5.00pm Mon-Fri.)

Pensioners' Guide

This is a useful Guide to the wide range of services and organisations working for senior citizens. To obtain a copy telephone: 08456 065 065.

Internet: www.info4pensioners.gov.uk