

'They will still bear fruit': Learning to grow old faithfully according to Scripture

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Now, the handouts are also going around, so that handout will be the one that will guide you through today's seminar. And maybe while that is happening, let me just explain to you where the first thought of this seminar came to my mind.

It was actually a few years ago, you might remember, for those of you who attend our church, we did a sermon series on Ecclesiastes, and Ecclesiastes, of course, is very much a reflection on the gravity of life.

And actually, I realized that it had quite a bit to say, I thought, to the question of what it meant to grow, and what it means to live faithfully for God.

And actually, at that point, I actually wanted to do, and I thought it would be worth doing an aging seminar in conjunction, with Ecclesiastes. But unfortunately, I never found the time or the energy to prep it.

So the project kind of laid in the background for a couple of years. And then late last year, I thought, it's really time to try to really, really get this seminar going again, because I think it will be really helpful for our church, because I know that there's a big segment in our church who fall into the category of being on the older side.

[1 : 31] I think if you look at the statistics for the attendance of this seminar today, I think, after you say, about 70% of the people registered are 50 and above.

So that's the kind of demographic that is today. So today, I will mainly be talking directly to those of us who might consider ourselves in that age bracket, I suppose.

But for those of you who are below that age bracket, I hope that what will happen is that you'll benefit a lot from overhearing what is being said, and that will prove to be very beneficial to you as well.

And you can see that the aim of this seminar is right there at the top of your handout. Is there an extra handout? I don't know. Can I have one as well? Are there any extras left?

Just so that I can see where you are as well. So my aim today is just to help people understand aging from a biblical perspective.

[2 : 38] So not from my perspective. Obviously, I'm not that old. Although I'm probably not as young as you think I am. But what we are interested in is not so much my perspective, but the Bible's perspective, and then to be encouraged to keep living for Christ, even in old age.

But let me begin by getting you to do some work. So I want you to just get into small groups, just maybe three or four people, or wherever you're seated around you. And you can see at the top of your page, there's that little statement.

Most want to live longer, few want to grow old. So get into your groups, and then why don't you reflect on that statement. What might the writer mean?

Do you agree? And how do you feel about aging in general? So get into little groups around you, three or four people, and discuss them. And the question is, it depends on the question.

it depends on the question. And the question is, it depends on the question. And the question is, it depends on the question. it depends on the question. it depends on the question. And the question is, it depends on the question.

[3 : 55] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[6 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 05] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[14 : 05] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[19 : 05] Now, Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Here is Psalm 27.

Right?

[22 : 05] Thank you.

I think, Thank you.

In verses 9-11.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[25 : 05] As we grow older, He is worried.

Thank you.

of my life where I now have a family and basically all the problems I'm facing will be minimized, there'll be no more problems because I've been working hard.

You're in that kind of mode of thinking. But this psalm warns us that we might actually never reach a stage where our problems all go away.

James Boyce, who is a veteran pastor, he's written a commentary on the psalms and he says that the speaker might have expected mature age, when he reached mature age to bring exemption from such attacks.

[27 : 16] But such is not the case. He's still facing threats from his enemies, he's still struggling with all these people who are against him. He thought he'll be free of all that by now. But they're still with him in his old age.

And then thirdly, I think another big fear for many of us is that he's worried about being alone. So again, the end of verse 11, for no one will rescue him.

Again, as James Boyce observes, the third thing that bothered King David, King David is the psalmist here, is that as he grew older, he had fewer people to help him, to help him shoulder all those burdens.

So even though there might be other godly people around, there's a difference now, because many of his contemporaries are gone.

They have died. So yes, true, there is the next generation, and maybe they might come and help him out, or visit him from time to time, but it just isn't the same.

[28 : 19] It isn't the same as the support that he received from his long-time friends, you know, friends who have been with him for decades, who are now all gone. So I think Psalm 71 names some of the common fears that are associated with ageing.

But, you know, of course we can add quite a few more, and that's also on your handout. So here are a few more, and maybe you can even add more to this list. Another fear that people will have will be regret as they enter old age, they'll look back, and they'll think about how they regretted, you know, not saying the things that they should have said to their loved ones, or maybe saying things that they shouldn't have said to their loved ones, right?

Or maybe they think back to there was some sort of opportunity that they felt like, oh, they should have taken hold of that opportunity when I had the chance, but now it's all in the past. Maybe something you wish you had learned many years ago, but you never got down to it, and you feel that that ship has sailed as well.

So regrets. There's also the stripping away of so much which once gave identity. You know, for many years and decades, you are a lawyer, a teacher, a doctor, whatever it might be, right? And maybe you've been a parent. First you've been a parent to young kids, then you were a parent to teenagers, right? Maybe your appearance or your possessions, recognition, you were, you know, maybe in a job where you supervised a lot of people, right?

[29 : 57] And certainly, it's not there anymore, right? Those are things that form part of your identity for a very long time, and certainly, they are not there. And that can be very, very hard and challenging as well.

Having to grieve more, I think I'll just mention this with King David, right? It's just a fact of life, isn't it? That as you grow older, you just experience more bereavements because more of your friends, your classmates, your peers, they have begun to pass away, right?

I remember my father, I hadn't noticed this, after my uncle, so his younger brother, passed away, 2018, I think, and suddenly my father developed a bit of an obsession with all the dreams, and then he'll always bring me the newspaper and he'll tell me, oh, this one was my friend, and he's now gone.

And then a few months later, he'll come and say, oh, this one is my friend, and he's now gone. Obviously, my father was quite affected by all that, and he used to have a group of friends he'll meet in a coffee shop every Saturday, and then that group slowly really don't like as more people pass on.

So having to grieve more, multiple grievements. There's despair at being useful because you feel like I've got less strength, less energy, or maybe I have less understanding of the world, so there's that.

[31 : 24] Maybe there's a disproportionate concern with comfort and well-being, so we're worried about facing discomfort as we get older. There is the narrowing of horizons, so maybe people are worried that, oh, I don't have anything to invest my time in anymore, I don't really have a hobby or a project, you know, something that might give me some purpose, that kind of thing.

here is a pretty painful one, I think, children who don't believe, that can also be something very painful in your old age because you feel like there's not much I can change at this point.

Loss of interest in things and appetite for life, unforgiveness, broken relationships, and then anger at the world being out of our control. So all these things, right, things that are associated with age, or at least the fears associated with ageing.

So, given this state of affairs, how might people often respond to the process of ageing? Right? How do people normally respond to all these kind of fears?

I think there are three common responses. The first is denial. Let me read to you something from this book.

[32 : 49] I think you're going to find it a bit funny. So there's a certain so-called doctor. Her name is called Dr. Northrop. Right? And she wrote an article called Tips for Becoming the Ageless Goddess You Are Meant to Be.

Right? The ageless. So here are the tips, huh? To be the ageless goddess. Right? Right? Right? So, she says, tip one, reframe the term aging.

Aging is generally used to describe the process of deterioration and decline. But, Dr. Mario Martina says, growing older is inevitable but aging is optional.

So pay attention to the words you use when you speak about growing older. That's what Susanna's point was. Right? Don't use the word old. Right? In other words, she's trying to say, if you don't talk about aging, it won't happen.

That's only tip one. Tip two, update your beliefs. Your beliefs are far stronger than your genes. For example, do you believe that after 40, it is all downhill?

[34 : 02] Or all the good men are already taken? Or you cannot have great sex after age 50? Well, until you bring these beliefs of consciousness, they can adversely affect your biology. In other words, if you refuse to believe you are old, then you won't be old.

Tip three, age-proof yourself now. The physical effects that we cumulatively call aging can be prevented by lifestyle choices. Okay, now that sounds a little bit more sensible, but of course, the truth is, no matter how healthy your diet is, it still won't prevent you from getting older.

Right? Last tip, actually, there's a few more, but which one should I choose? I think this tip is good.

Tip five, resolve to get younger next year.

That's your New Year resolution. There is a huge difference between biologic, she means the age of your cells, and chronologic age, which is the age of your driver's license.

Right? By implementing lifestyle improvements, you can quite literally reverse the clock and grow biologically younger, and you can become that ageless goddess. And the writer of this book says they call Christians naive.

[35 : 23] Right? How can they call Christians naive when people write such things? But, see, that's denial, isn't it? Right? That's just saying that they're trying to just say all sorts of things to get away from the idea of aging.

But maybe the second response is maybe slightly more common, which is resignation. Right? The truth is, and I think some of you have already alluded to this, that as you get older, sometimes you can feel like the world around you has changed, isn't it?

Right? If you was alien, right, now I have to download so many apps just to play one deal. Right?

Isn't it true? Right? Right? What's all this chat GPT thing? You know?

Right? And sometimes there can be that temptation to just give up, right? And say, look, I'm old, so I totally cannot learn anything. Right? I'm just like that lah. Right?

This is what one old person, Amy, said. She said that she found going to busy places on her own very hard because she thought that everyone was looking at her, so she felt very self-conscious.

[36 : 26] You know? She said, I would always do it with her husband, with Tony, my husband, right? But to do it on her own, right? She just felt like it's just too much of a challenge.

She said she knows that's illogical, but that's just how she feels. So sometimes we can have this feeling of vaccination, which by the way, is not quite the same as depression.

Depression is something slightly different, right? So I'm not talking so much about depression, which I think you do need to go and see a doctor and all that, but here is just the feeling of I'm old, I can't do anything about it.

And then there is the response of selfish living, right? The theologian J.I. Packer once observed that retirees are admonished, both explicitly and implicitly, in terms that boil down to this.

You know, this is what retirees often hear. Relax, slow down, amuse yourself, do only what you enjoy. You're not required to run things anymore. You're not required to take responsibility for many things.

[37 : 26] You're out of the rat race. now you're finally your own person, right? So concentrate on having fun, right? You have your pension, health services are there to look after your body, so make sure that you go to clubs, to outings, to tours, to parties, to entertainment, all sorts of entertainment to pass the time.

Go ahead and practice self-indulgence up to the limit, right? And so, I can say it's more, but you get the idea, right? that one response is just to say, all right, it's all about me now, I have no more responsibilities, let's just go and live for myself.

So I think those are three very common responses. But what does the Bible say should be the right response? Well, the Bible says that the better response is to receive aging as a gift from God and to

learn how to embrace that gift with faith.

Let's come back again to Psalm 71, but now we're going to look at other parts of the psalm. So turn back with me to Psalm 71. And as we come back to that psalm, we realize that David, that's exactly how David thought of O.H., right?

He wants to see O.H. as something given by God, one of his good gifts, something that should be used for his glory and for the blessing and well-being of others.

[38 : 55] So how does he do this? He does that by pausing to look back over his long life and reflect on what he has learned about God, right? So this is David in his O.H., right?

And we know it's his O.H. because in verse 9, he says, do not cast me when I am old, right? So he's reflecting on his life, back on his life. So he says, verse 1, in you, Lord, I have taken refuge. Let me never be put to shame. And then down in verse 7, I have become a sign to many, you are my strong refuge. So the first thing he wants to acknowledge is that God is his refuge, his fortress, his rock, his righteous savior, right?

You can see those words also in verse 3, be my rock of refuge, right? Yeah, at the end of verse 3, my rock and my fortress. And so, also in verse 5, he says that you have been my hope, sovereign lord, my confidence since my youth.

And so David, decades after his first acts of faith, in his old age, is still continually coming to God, is still saying that I can put my hope in God, because he knows that God is like this, right?

[40 : 14] That's precisely why he can put his hope in God, his confidence. God is my refuge, my fortress, my rock, from even my young age, right? So even though I'm facing all those things that he names in verses 9 to 11, he still has confidence in God.

And that is also the confidence that we can have. And let me just read to you, this is also on your handout, right? And I think this is a very precious verse for those of us who are older.

This is from Isaiah 46, verse 4. This is what God says, Even to your old age and grey hairs, I am he. I am he who will sustain you.

I have made you and I will carry you. I will sustain you. And I will rescue you. See, that's a precious promise that God makes to those of us who are older.

And in fact, the aim of this seminar today is really to convince you that Isaiah 46 is true.

[41 : 18] Alright, so we've named so far the fears and the challenges of old age, but now the question is how can we grow old well in a manner that is pleasing to God and that is Christ-like in nature.

Right? So what we're going to do now is we're going to explore the biblical perspective on aging or later life. Right? So what does the Bible say about old age?

And we're going to look at it from three angles. Right? And now I'm going to get you back into your small groups. Right? So you can see that on your handout there is a little box.

Right? Let me just turn to that page. Right? Yeah, where it says a biblical survey that's at the bottom of page 3. So get back into your biblical group. Look at all the following verses and answer this question.

In these verses, what is old age associated with? And how do these verses imagine or conceive of the experience of old age? old age?

[42 : 21] Okay, let's come back. Never mind if you're quite finished. The other people will help you with the answers. verse 1.

Okay, so let's look at that first bullet point with Job 12, the little story of 1 Kings 12 and Proverbs 3. What is old age associated with? What kind of thing is? Wisdom, isn't it? Yeah, that's right. It is wisdom, isn't it? Wisdom brings benefits, right?

And I suppose it's exemplified in that 1 Kings story where Rebbe Boehm didn't listen to the elders, right? And that resulted in something that was not good for his kingdom, right?

He chose to ignore their advice. Proverbs 3 verse 1 to 2, it says, let me just turn through it, right? Don't forget my teaching, this is the father talking to the son, right?

[43 : 20] But keep my commands in your heart for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. So again, the benefits of wisdom. So OH is associated with wisdom. The next group of verses, Proverbs 16 verse 31, Leviticus 1 to 35, what is OH associated with?

Okay, one word is respect. Okay, why do you say that for those of you answered respect? Where do you get that from? glory, Yes, yes, that's right.

So Paul gives this explicit command, right? He says that when you're talking to the older men, you treat them with respect, with esteem. Okay. What else?

What other words? So esteem and respect, those kind of words. Glory. Glory, right? So that's that Proverbs verse. Your grey hair is a crown of splendor.

Right? So it's associated with glory and splendor and those kind of things, right? And the two are connected, actually.

[44 : 40] It's because you are crowned with glory. That's why you are respected and esteemed, right? That's kind of how it works together. That's the kind of idea, right? Right? The next set of verses, Psalm 92.

Fruitful. Yeah, that's right, right? And actually that's where the title of this seminar comes from, right? He shall still bear fruit, right? So even in their old age, right, they'll stay fresh and green. So it's a picture of old age and yet you can still be fruitful. And Titus 2 kind of elaborates on that a bit more. What does Titus 2 show us?

It's worthy of respect. That's right. That's one of the things that the older man is supposed to do. They need to conduct themselves wisely.

I guess. Yeah. In a way, that is with reverence. Isn't it, right? So in other words, they're basically role models, aren't they, right? So in a way, that's how they bear fruit, right?

[45 : 44] By being that role model of faith. Ecclesiastes 12, which is picture language. You got a bit confused with all the, you know, house items getting broken down.

But what's Ecclesiastes 12 talking about? Trouble. Trouble. Trouble. But what sort of trouble in particular? What's that?

Oh, okay, okay. That's that part about, yeah, they're very scared about going out. Yeah, yeah, yeah. What else? Mortality. Mortality, yeah. Yeah, I suppose so. But maybe a bit more specific.

Body sort of getting older and being affected. Yeah, yeah. So it's actually picture language. So when he talks about the doors and, you know, almond tree and the grasshopper dragging along stuff and the desire no longer is, right?

It's actually picture language talking about the body. The body is breaking down, right? So that's what is happening here. So later life is characterized by increasing weakness, right?

[46 : 54] And of course, we can think of many biblical examples. Think of Isaac, for example, in the Old Testament, in his old age, he couldn't see, right? So that's one that negatively impacts his life, right?

Numbers 8. This one is a bit more implied. Numbers 8. Retirement. Retirement. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. But again, it seems to suggest a picture of decline, right? That's why they're not to serve after a particular age, right? Leave it to the younger people. You know, that kind of idea, right? Yeah, no whole.

Yeah, that's right. And Psalm 71, which is the one we looked at already. Yeah, physical decline and, of course, impending death, right?

Mortality, right? So, as we consider these verses together, they paint a particular picture for us, don't they, right? So, on the one hand, the Bible is positive about old age.

[47 : 55] I hope you saw that, especially with the top half of all those verses, right? It suggests that, ideally, as you get older, what has happened, ideally, is that you have accumulated a lifetime of wisdom, of knowing how God's world works and how to best live in it.

Now, as I'll show you a little bit later, it's a bit less straightforward than that. But, generally, if you are a person who has lived for God over many, many years, right, you should have gotten wisdom, so that when you reach old age, you can be considered somebody who is wise, right?

And, because you have that wisdom, therefore, you have glory, right? And, grey or white hair is a symbol of long life, and if that life has been used to grow in wisdom, and that it's clear to everyone around you, that it's no surprise that people honour you, isn't it, and people respect you, and want to follow in your footsteps, right?

So, that's the positive side. But then, the Bible is also a matter of fact, right, that ageing also involves degeneration, as many of you have already said, right?

So, we've got that picture of Ecclesiastes 12, right, you know, our strength failing and so on, right? I've already mentioned Isaac, as someone who is, Isaac is falling.

[49 : 16] The Apostle Paul talks about the body fading away, so all those kind of things. So, okay, so that's one way we can put what the Bible says about ageing, which is by taking a survey and

looking up all these verses which seem to allude to old age, and that way we manage to come up with this particular picture, right, of both positive and negative.

And yet, that is not the only angle that we should consider from, right? So, there's actually two more angles that we should consider from which will enrich our picture of what old age looks like.

So, the second way of doing so is to consider some of the ageing characters in the Bible, right, and draw some theological reflections from their stories, right? Now, to keep it manageable, we won't look at every single old character in the Bible, but we will look only at a few from the New Testament.

So, first of all, let's consider Luke's Gospel. And actually, it's quite interesting, isn't it? Because, think about it, in the opening chapters of Luke, Luke chapter 1, who are the very first prominent characters to appear?

Can someone tell me? Who is the very first prominent character in Luke's Gospel? You can turn to him. Not Theophilus. We don't know how old Theophilus is. I don't think he was that old.

[50 : 40] That's right! Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth, right? And what's the first thing we're told about them? Luke chapter 1, verse 7? Old and his wife.

They're very old. So, it's interesting, isn't it, that Luke chooses to introduce his Gospel with old people, right? And what is their... How else are they described, besides being old?

They're very old. Childless, okay, that's their problem. Besides that? Righteous, blameless, those kind of words, isn't it, right?

So, they are old, but they are righteous and blameless in their conduct. But, as you guys also know, they have one problem, which is that they are childless. And, of course, when they are childless, that also recalls another couple who are very old.

Who is? Abraham and Sarah, who are also very old, right? And so, there's a deliberate echo, right? But, of course, what happens? What happens next in the story?

[51 : 39] Okay, and what does God do in their lives? Yeah, God says that, look, even in your old age, you can have a child, isn't it?

And isn't that already hinting at something that we saw in Psalm 92? Psalm 92 said, in your old age, you can still be fruitful, right? And fruitfulness is still possible.

And here it is. Exemplified in the life of Elizabeth and Zechariah, right? So, God is powerful and gracious to make anything happen, no matter how old the people are.

Now, of course, we all know that Zechariah is not perfect. We know that he initially doubts, and then he struck dumb, right? But, eventually, right, he does obey, right?

And, come with me again and look at chapter 1, verse 41, right? Look at chapter 1, verse 41. Let me read it to you. When Elizabeth, this is when Mary visits Elizabeth.

[52 : 43] When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And then you come down to verse 67. 67.

And this time, he's talking about Zechariah. It says, his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and from his side. And he begins to praise God, right? But notice again, these are the first two people in Luke's Gospel to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And who are they? They are the oldies. They are the oldies, right? And, of course, when we talk about him being filled with the Holy Spirit, right? What does that mean, actually?

For Zechariah, it means that he praises God and he speaks the Gospel. Because the words he says next are all about how Jesus has fulfilled Scripture. But they're not the only old couple in Luke's Gospel.

Because in Luke chapter 2, can you tell me, who is the next old couple who appears on the scene? Simeon and? Anna, right? Right? And again, they're described as pretty elderly, isn't it, right?

[53 : 46] And what's Simeon doing? What's he waiting for? Yeah, he's waiting for the consolation of Israel, right?

In other words, the fulfillment of Scripture. Does he get this here? Yes, yeah. So here is somebody who's been waiting so many years, faithfully, and he gets what he desires.

And then Anna, who is described as being in her 80s, right? What is her daily habit? Anyone know? You can look at it. Yeah, yeah, that's right. Going to the temple to worship and to pray.

And eventually, she also runs into Jesus, right? And he declares the good news about him, right? So once again, when we see Simeon and Anna, how are they presented by Luke?

Luke is presenting them as a picture of faithfulness, right? They are people who have been putting their hope in God for numbers and numbers of years, right?

[54 : 44] I mean, Anna is going to the temple at, you know, 84 or something like that, right? And whatever age it is, right? So Luke is showing here that when people in their old age, when they remain faithful, it is actually a rare and attractive picture.

Right? Okay, let's look. More briefly, John. This one a bit harder. Any old people in John? This one is less obvious.

Less obvious. What's that? John himself, we're not sure. Well, he's Jesus' cousin, isn't he? So he probably isn't that much older than Jesus.

Now, we cannot be certain, but possibly Nicodemus is one of them, right? Right? The reason why we can say this is, although we're not told his age, number one, he is a well-respected ruler of the Jews.

That's how it's described, which suggests he has quite a few years under his belt. But more interestingly, it's also implied in the question that he asked Jesus. You know, in John 3, verse 4, he says, you know, after Jesus says, you know, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they're born again.

[56 : 00] Nicodemus says, how can someone be born when they are? Oh, which seems to imply that, because he seems to be implicitly talking about himself, right? So he seems like he might be somebody who is old.

But Nicodemus, how is he a bit different from Simeon and Anna, right? When he meets Jesus, what's his response to Jesus? At least in John chapter 3.

He is respectful, it's true. He seeks knowledge. Does he actually gain that knowledge? Not really, right?

Even at the end of the encounter, he's still completely bewildered. He has no idea what all this being born again stuff is all about. And Jesus says to him, you are Israel's teacher, you do not know these things, right?

And this also helps us to understand another point about old age, right? It is true that you should get wiser as you get older, but actually there is no necessary or no automatic correlation between old age and wisdom, right?

[57 : 08] So we cannot presume that we will gain wisdom just by virtue of getting old. Now to be fair to Nicodemus, by the end of John's Gospel, I think he does gain a bit more insight towards the end.

He's there when the burial happens. And I do think that he becomes a believer at the end. But at that point in John 3, he's totally lost. And then very briefly, Paul, right?

We know Paul has already mentioned things like 1 Timothy 5, respect your elders, stuff like that. Paul does refer to himself once as an old man in Philemon 9.

And it's quite interesting. He says, I'm old, but at the same time he says, I'm a prisoner of Jesus. That's the other description he uses of himself.

So notice this. Even in his old age, the most important thing for him is that he belongs to Jesus. Immediately he says, I'm a prisoner of Jesus. It's not that I'm old. That's not so important to him.

[58 : 06] So those are some of the Bible characters who we can look at, who are old. But of course, there's one more person that we should consider whenever we're thinking about such things.

And that is, of course, Jesus himself. How might Jesus' life and death specifically speak into old age? Now at first it seems like, actually, what can Jesus offer?

Because Jesus himself never grew old. Am I right? So, is there anything that we can learn from Jesus, considering that he never grew old?

Actually, there is. Firstly, the fact that Jesus died young reminds us that faithfulness is more important than longevity.

Faithfulness is more important than longevity. Now, if God gives us many years, that is a blessing, right? That's what the Proverbs says, right?

[59 : 12] But actually, we should never think that we are entitled to a long life, right? But what Jesus' life reminds us is that what God really values is whether we are living a cross-shaped life or not.

A cross-shaped life that is offered entirely to God. It means also, one of the implications of this is that we don't cling to our life at all costs.

What matters most is not longevity, but faithfulness. But then consider also this, from Jesus' life. Consider that later life might actually be the most significant portion of your life. Ninety percent of the Gospels are about the last ten percent of Jesus' life.

Isn't it? It's actually about the last lap of life that Jesus undertakes. You know, most of us think that our greatest achievements will come about when we are in the prime of our life.

[60 : 18] You know, when we are like 35 or something like that. Because that's when you think that you're bright, you're energetic, all those kind of things. But, as you know, God's kingdom is always upside down.

And if the most significant portion of Jesus' life is the last ten percent of his life, how do you know that it's also not true for you? It could very well be that Jesus has decided, or God has decided, that actually, it is your O-H that will be the time where you will actually have the most impact for the kingdom if you choose to be faithful to him.

And then thirdly, consider the cross of Christ itself. Now, remember what we said was associated with O-H so far, right? We said O-H is associated with wisdom.

We said it's associated with glory and honor. Right? It's a place of honor. And we also said that it's associated with weakness. Right? So, those are kind of the four big themes, right? Wisdom, honor, and glory.

Right? Weakness, right? Now, think about it. Where else do these four themes, wisdom, honor, glory, and weakness, come together?

[61 : 35] The answer is the cross. The cross, what Corinthians 1 says, is the wisdom of God, right? To the foolish. In John 12, it says it is the glory of Christ.

In Philippians 2, it is the place of honor. Jesus humbled himself to the, even to death, but then he was exalted. And, of course, the cross is described as weakness.

Again, 1 Corinthians 1. So, because all those four themes come together in only one other place, and that is the cross. Now, what does that tell us? It tells us there is a sense in which your O-H can be a unique pointer to the cross.

Right? Now, it's true that whatever age we are at, even when we are young, we can also exhibit honorable behavior, glorious behavior. We can exhibit wisdom.

And, of course, we can also suffer weakness even when we are young. But, given that these four things are especially associated with O-H, right? So, if you are O, and you have all these characteristics, in a way, you can showcase the cross in an especially clear way.

[62 : 45] You know? If you show yourself to be someone who is very honorable, even when you are dealing with the challenges and the weaknesses that you face. And, if we continue to ponder on the cross, consider this.

You know, on the cross, Jesus was physically unable to do anything, isn't it? At that point, he's just hanging there. But, it's at that point, he is submissive to the will of God.

And, in that sense, Jesus is also embodying the kind of posture that we should have when we are old, and maybe even when we are on our deathbeds. Right?

Even when we are on our deathbeds. Right? Yes, we cannot do anything, and yet, we can still be submissive to the will of God. And, it also gives us a dignity. Because, if you feel useless at that point, the cross shows us that it's nothing to be ashamed of.

Because, that's exactly how Jesus felt on the cross. Isn't it? So, let me summarize and synthesize some of our findings so far. Right?

[63 : 49] Number one, aging is natural. So, the Bible assumes that we will all grow old, and that in itself is not a problem. What is the enemy?

It's death. Not aging in itself. It's death that is the enemy. Right? So, the Bible never characterizes aging as something evil. Right? And, you know, there's some modern people, right?

They might say that, oh, going old is the problem. Right? And, they try all sorts of things to try to reverse their effects. But, the Bible itself doesn't think of it that way. It thinks of it as something natural.

But, aging is not glamorized either. We already saw that. Right? So, the Bible does not deny that there are many disadvantages that come with aging, and many weaknesses, the weakness of our bodies, the regrets, and so on.

It says that it should be an honor to be aged. The Bible clearly envisions that if you have lived to a right old age, you should have reached a position where you are deserving of respect and honor. [64:52] And, actually, that means that, actually, in church, it is right to try to honor our elders. Right? Right? But, number four, simply being old doesn't automatically make you honorable.

We've already seen the example of... Lickered E.S. Here's another Old Testament example. Eli. Everyone remember who is Eli?

So, Eli is the priest in the temple. Right? But, he's quite blind in the end, isn't he? He cannot see the work of God in Samuel. Right? He thought that, you know, he thought that, who was it?

He thought that Hannah was drunk, isn't he? Right? And, he couldn't control his sons. Yeah. Yeah. So, again, it's not automatic. Right?

And, you can see that there are also negative examples in Scripture. Right? And, of course, in places like 1 Timothy 4 verse 12, Paul says, you know, the young can also lead the way in exhibiting honor as well.

[65:57] You know, be honorable in your conduct. Right? So, it's not automatic correlation with old and young, honor and dishonor. But, given that, you know, it should be an honor to be aged, therefore, older people should strive to be exemplary in faith.

Right? Right? That's what Titus 2 says. Right? It is actually the responsibility of the older people to lead the way. Right? Again, the examples are Simeon and Anna and people like that.

Right? And, the ultimate example is by living a cross-shaped life, which we've talked about a bit already. And, therefore, actually, the time to prepare for old age is now.

Right? So, even if you have not hit 50 or whatever age is considered old yet. Right? Now is the time to prepare. Because, you don't just become wise and faithful just like that. Right?

You want the foundations to be laid as soon as possible. So, whatever age you're at, right? Time to build that foundation. Right? And, on the flip side, nowhere in the Bible are people pitied or patronized simply because they are old.

[67:07] Right? So, the Bible doesn't see old people as, oh, they are automatically unproductive or they're irrelevant. On the contrary, as we've already seen, God says there is always the possibility of fruitiness.

Right? However, unexpected. Even, and like I said just now, even later life could be actually the most significant portion of your life.

Okay, let's get to the last part of the seminar for tonight. And hopefully, it's just some slightly more practical stuff. How then should we run the last laps of our race?

Let's look at Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 to 3. Quite familiar verses. Let me appoint someone to read so that Lailia, you don't mind reading for us.

Okay, there. Hebrews 12, verse 1 to 3. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily enthralls.

[68:11] And let us run through perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning his shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider Him to endure such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Thank you, Lailia. Now, what we have here is that familiar picture of a marathon race.

Now, notice it is a race marked out for us. So we didn't choose it, but we have to run the path or the route that God laid out for us. But the good news, of course, of Hebrews 12 is that we are not alone. There are people around us who are, whether there are people in the past or people presently with us who are cheering us on. But in any marathon, we need perseverance, right?

And actually, when you think of a marathon, it is actually the last part of the race that is often the hardest, isn't it? Right? Because that is when you are most tempted to give up, right?

[69:18] Because your legs feel so heavy, you know, you feel like, I cannot move anymore, right? And that is especially when we need to fix our eyes on Jesus and fix our eyes on the prize, right?

So those are the two key things that Hebrews 12 says we should fix our eyes on, which is Jesus and the future that he brings, which is far better than anything we have in the present. So for the remainder of our time, let me just focus on two particular laps.

The first lap is post-retirement, the lap where we have retired from our work, but we are probably still relatively healthy, still able-bodied.

And then the second lap is where we are beginning to approach the finishing line and death is coming closer, right? So how should we live out or how should we run that first lap, the post-retirement lap, right?

Well, first of all, don't live your remaining years in contented selfishness, right? Remember that retirement from your present work is not retirement from living to the glory of God, right?

[70 : 25] As I think I alluded earlier, the world's idea of retirement is you've worked very hard for X number of years, now is the time to enjoy yourself, so go ahead and take off your bucket list or whatever it is, right?

But as Christians, we shouldn't have that kind of attitude. We should ask different questions instead, right? We should ask, now that I'm retired, what opportunities do I have to serve God that were not available when I was still in full-time employment, now that I have more flexibility, maybe, right?

That kind of thing, right? Maybe there are certain things that I can do, right? Help babysit somebody's kids or whatever it might be, right? And instead of saying, what am I free from?

We should ask instead, what am I free for, right? What am I free to do? And instead of thinking, what have I lost? We should think, what can I do now, right?

So these are some of the questions we can ask, right? So the Bible says, we live to glorify God, not for self-indulgence. And then we should prepare well before we hit this stage, and maybe here, I'm talking to those who haven't quite retired yet, right?

[71 : 42] If aging is natural and inevitable, then we should do all we can to prepare for the next stage of life, which means that it's good to plan in such a way that when you get to later life, you're freed up to serve God as best as you can, right?

So that might mean practical things, right? Like trying to make sure that your finances are in order, right? As much as they possibly can, because there are things that are beyond your control. But if your finances are sorted, then at least you don't have to worry about it in your retirement and you're more free to think about how you can serve God, right?

It might mean trying to invest in relationships or in friendships now as much as you can, right? And it might even mean trying to look after your own health as best as you can, right?

Not for the sake of just preserving yourself, but so that you can have the flexibility later on in later life to serve God as well as you can, right? And maybe one really important thing also, and it's true for all of us, is to prepare, is to make sure that your identity now is grounded in Christ and not in your work, right?

I mean, it's really, really easy, isn't it, to find all our identity in the work that we do, and then about one day that will go away. And sometimes that transition might be very abrupt and very hard to navigate.

[73 : 00] So if we can already ground our identity in Christ, when that is eventually no more, then at least we can be able to transition to the next stage of life. Now, one of the some things that we can do, there's no surprise, I think, here, right?

One thing we can always do, of course, is pray, right? Vaughn Roberts, who is my old pastor, he's the author of Godspeed Pictures, some of you have read it, he tells of a story of a senior lady in his church.

She will always call him regularly, you know, Hi, Pastor Vaughn, how are you? She would like to do that. And then she will immediately ask, how can I pray for you? Right? And then, you know, she lived until late 90s or something, right?

She would do that regularly. Now, she's not anyone famous, she won't be remembered by history books, but you can be sure that she had an outsized impact on the kingdom, right?

And hopefully you're praying, not just because you have more time, but actually because, in a sense, your prayers might be especially well-informed if you have managed to grow wisdom up to this point.

[74 : 10] So that's prayer. Then there's passing down the faith, which I think is a big theme in the Bible, right? So, let's just read some of these verses. Psalm, let's go back to Psalm 71, which is the psalm that we looked at earlier, but we haven't read this verse, I think.

Psalm 71, verse 8. When is this when you get there, you don't mind reading verse?

Verse 8, eh? Yeah, my mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long, right?

And we won't turn to the other reference, but the other reference is in 145, verse 4, and it says something similar, but it says declaring your deeds to the next generation, right? And you can find a few other psalms that say similar things, right?

2 Timothy 1, verse 5, we won't turn there, but of course we know that Lois and Eunice also passed down the faith to Timothy. I think some of you will remember that verse. So, what are some of the things you can do?

[75 : 19] So, as older people, or those who are older, we can invest in intergenerational friendships and encouragement, right? So, now that might feel a bit scary sometimes, because sometimes we feel like, oh, I don't really understand all these young people, or what kind of stuff they're into, or we feel like we have nothing to offer, right?

But, it's not true, right? Right? Even if you just show a simple thing, you don't have to understand everything that they're into, but if you show that you care, you are ready to offer a listening ear, that is actually more than enough.

When I was an 18-year-old at university, there was an American man called Joe Martin, who is, at that point he was 70, I think, and he's 70. So, I'm a little scared, lonely, international student in England, right?

You know, he would invite me to his house, and then, sometimes with his grandkids there, right? And then, you know, he would just, you know, play some board games, or just talk a bit, or don't even need to talk so much.

If I want to look at his library, I can, right? So, he does all these things, and actually, he's got lots and lots of wisdom, as well. So, sometimes I just listen to him, right?

[76 : 35] So, that's just an example of someone who, I think, he's passed away now, but someone who has had, just by showing that, you know, he took an interest, he had made an impression on my life, right?

Offering life wisdom in a non-judgmental way, right? One of the big dangers of growing older is judgmentalism. Why this generation, like that one, right?

Why they do things so differently for us, right? So, Hannah was misjudged by Eli, who mistook her faithfulness for drunkenness, right? So, I encourage us to be slow in passing judgment, but at the same time, we recognize you do have life experience, right?

You have probably failed more times than we have succeeded, you know, that kind of idea, right?

And so, there's definitely something that you can offer. There's definitely advice and corrections that you can make, right?

But without necessarily painting it in a black and white way, right? Think of the way that the father speaks to the son in the book of Proverbs. Go back and, you know, read a bit about how he does it, right? So, that is something that you can offer.

[77 : 50] And, again, this is more effective if you have already invested in intergenerational friendship in the first place, right? If you go to a younger person but you are a stranger to them, they are less likely to take something from you than if you have already built some sort of relationship or friendship with them.

set a life example. We've already talked about Titus 2, right? When we see older people who are grateful and humble, right?

Those are actually very, very attractive traits to see, right? And, I think younger people especially appreciate that because they know that you have seen more in life, right?

And yet, you're exhibiting humility and gratitude, right? You're like, wow, even after all these years and all the challenges and trials that he's faced but he's still grateful to God, you know, that's a big encouragement to people.

Hopefulness is also along the same lines. Billy Graham once said, old people can be some of the worst witnesses because they are so grumpy and so cynical, right?

[78 : 57] And he says that what they need to do is actually they need to be hopeful, they need to keep pointing to the hope of resurrection, right? So that's what he means by hopefulness. And then, leave behind a legacy, right?

So ask yourself, what am I leaving behind? Not just things, not just money, but what kind of relationships am I leaving behind, right? What are the people I'm invested in going to be like, right? And are there any especially important things that I want to impart to them before I go? that's what Paul did to Timothy, isn't it? I mean, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, you're going to have to turn to it, I'll just

read it to you, right?

So 2 Timothy, we all know this is Paul's last letter, he's going to be in prison, right? But, he wanted to impart some final words to Timothy, and in verse 5, chapter 4, verse 5, he says this to Timothy, So, sometimes, it might be worth thinking, what important words do I actually want to leave behind for the next generation?

What do I want to say to them? Which I hope will impact them for better, right? We keep continuing in discipling and serving, right?

[80 : 25] Again, that theme of fruitfulness in old age, you can still be fruitful in old age. There was an 82-year-old lady who had a quite severe limp, right?

But she would follow her church team who visited prisons, right? So, she couldn't serve the meal because she was limping, so she couldn't really stand much, so what she just did was she just sat down with the prisoners, right?

And then just listened to their stories, and just being a presence there, and even something simple like that, right? She was already offering something, right? So, those are perhaps some things that we can do.

Remember what 1 Corinthians 12 says, right? 1 Corinthians 12 says that every part of the body is necessary, right? So, even those that are considered weaker are necessary.

That's what 1 Corinthians 12 says. Continue in learning and obeying, okay, I think that's self-explanatory. Let me just get to the last part because I really want to finish off very soon, right?

[81 : 27] So, this is the very last lap. So, the first lap was post-retirement, but this is the finishing line. The finishing when we are actually weaker and actually we can see that death is really becoming more and more real to us.

and I tried to do this in terms of A, B, C, E, F, not entirely successfully, but A is for acceptance.

Now, because of time, I think we won't look at this passage. I wanted to get you to look at one more passage and then that was it, but I'll just tell you what the passage is. It's 2 Samuel 19 32-37.

2 Samuel 19 32-37. You can read it on your own. But basically, in that passage, we have somebody called Basili. Basili is a good friend of David.

He was one of his allies. He helped him against Absalom when Absalom was rebelling against him. In this little speech, it's actually a speech that shows us what he accepted as he grew old.

[82 : 37] He was elderly at this point. He realized that his wealth was no protection against old age. he realized that his cognitive faculties were no longer what it once was.

Hearing and all that is not good. He realized that his traveling days were done. So these were some of the things that he accepted. He couldn't do all these things anymore.

So one of the things we have to learn is to accept some of the inescapable indignities and you can even use the word embarrassments of old age.

Right? You have to accept that there will be a time where you have some loss of independence and certain things don't work as well as you can and you will just be frustrated.

There will be certain things that you will be frustrated with. Right? There is belief. So even in your old age, right, this is still a time where your faith in Christ can be strengthened.

[83 : 52] Right? So even as the effects of old age begin to become more and more pronounced in our lives, it is still a wonderful opportunity for us to renew our belief in Christ.

Some of you will know Mikko Thais. Mikko Thais is the presenter of Christianity Explored, the course that we run. He's the guy who appears on the video. And he tells a story about how he visited one of his church members, a very elderly lady named Anne.

So she went to the hospital or maybe not the hospital, it was a nursing home maybe. And then he went there and he said, oh, is Anne here? And then the nurse was like, who's Anne?

She said, you know, Anne, and he described her. And he said, oh, that's the girl that we always call her Gabby. Why do you call her Gabby? Oh, because we named her after the angel Gabriel because she always shines.

And the point that is being made here is that even though this lady was so weak and frail, but in her demeanor and in her outlook on life, she was so radiant and so full of Christ that even the nurses noticed and the nurses could see her testimony.

[85 : 06] So that's one thing. Seek contentment and closure. In old age, especially, there can still be areas where you can be discontent, where you're discontent with things in our family, our finances, our circumstances, whatever it is.

But Colossians chapter 2 verse 6 and 7 says that as we receive the Lord and as we continue in Him, we will overflow with thankfulness.

So the Bible encourages us to keep overflowing with thankfulness. I want you to notice something in John's Gospel. Let me turn to it.

You don't have to turn there. I'll read part of it to you. So this is John 11, which is when Jesus goes to meet Mary and Martha because they ask Him to come because their brother Lazarus has died. So it's obviously a very sad time. right? And of course Jesus is very sad. We all know that famous verse isn't it? Where it says that Jesus wept, right?

[86 : 15] But this is also interesting. Not only did Jesus weep in verse 41, Jesus prayed, Father I thank you that you have heard me.

It's quite interesting that this is a dark time, his good friend is dead, his weeping is indignant, and yet in that moment he can still find something to thank God for. Right?

He says I thank you as he prayed, I thank God. So that is again something that we can cultivate, right? And we should seek closure, right?

If there are any moments or any people whom you have a broken relationship with, right? It's good to try to repair that if you like.

before you go, right? Actually, sometimes I remember I asked this, our late ID, who was the admin of this church, right? She was on her deathbed with cancer, and a person, and all the things I did ask her was in this question, right?

[87 : 22] Are there any relationships that you need to kind of make sure that they're okay, that anyone need to forgive, and all that? Yeah, it's all okay, it's all done, it's close, I'm high five, I'm at peace, right?

So, we can seek closure in that respect. It's okay to be dependent, I think this is one of the greatest fears, isn't it, of people in OH, but being dependent is actually a creaturely trait, right?

God has made us humans from the very beginning, in Genesis 1 to be dependent. Did you realize that? Right? And so, if we are designed to be dependent, right, we shouldn't be worried about being dependent on others, right?

I love this quote from John Stott, it's one of my top three John Stott quotes of all times, right? He says this, he says, I sometimes hear old people, including Christian people who should know better, say, I don't want to be a burden to anyone else.

I'm happy to carry on living so long as I can look after myself, but as soon as I become a burden, I would rather die. But this is wrong. We are all designed to be a burden to others.

[88 : 44] You are designed to be a burden to me, and I'm designed to be a burden to you. And the life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of neutral burdensomeness.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. And so he's saying that we were all made to need one another. We were all made to actually depend on one another.

So actually it is not undignified to need to depend even in your old age. So it is not something that we should try to escape from.

And then let go as you focus on the finishing line. Embrace letting go as you go on the finishing line.

I want you to consider Jesus' final words on the cross.

First of all, he said, Father, forgive them. Right? That's closure, isn't it? And then what else did he say?

[89 : 55] He said, dear woman, here is your son. Right? He's preparing and caring for others, preparing for death.

He said to the thief, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. Jesus is saying impactful words, he's leaving his legacy, he wants to say his final words that will impact that thief, that will bring blessing.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus is being honest about the loss and the loneliness that the whole experience of approaching the final lap, the finishing line, can bring. Right? But then at the edge of face, it is finished. He's not clinging on to life, he's letting go, he's ready to die, he's ready to cross the finishing line.

Into your arms I commit my spirit, and he surrenders himself into the Father's arms. Let's go, ready to cross the finishing line.

[91 : 12] But, if life means Christ to us, death by implication can only be gain, isn't it? Right? And so actually, we don't have to fear death, that is the wonderful good news of the gospel.

We are Christians, that is something that we can be real share. so, here's the quote that is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, I don't know if he really said it enough, but, life well spent is long, right?

So no matter how short it is, if it is well spent, it's long enough. that's the point. Okay, sorry, I took longer than I expected as usual, right?

But that is actually the end of my seminar, right? So, I think we won't have any Q&A;, but if you want to come talk to me or ask me questions, actually you should ask the older people, they're the ones, they have more wisdom than me, right?

Go find the older elders, they'll get more wisdom than me. But, but, I want to make sure that we do spend some time just maybe praying about what we've heard, right?

[92 : 30] So I do want to, can I encourage you to just get into your little groups, right? And maybe just pray one or two things, or you can share maybe one or two things that you've taken away from this seminar, and then just maybe one person or two person can meet the group in prayer about the things you have learned, and then after that we'll sing our closing song, and then that will be the end of the seminar.

Okay, so I'll just give you a couple of minutes in your small groups, maybe just share one thing you've learned, and then pray about it, maybe just one person can pray, and then we'll sing.■