

— THE —
VICTORY LAP

GROWING OLD WITH GOD

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Introduction

It was March 2012, and I was on the main campus of Westchester High School to pick up a student for counseling at our student services nonprofit, Westchester Healthy Start. In the nine years I'd worked for Healthy Start, I'd called countless students. But today, something was different; something was wrong.

My life was pretty routine—working part-time for Healthy Start, keeping house and spending time with my husband Frank, who had recently retired; our son, Robert, who had moved back in to help us with house payments when his apartment complex was razed; and our daughter, Kathy, and granddaughter, Katyana, who came to visit most Sundays after church.

Babysitting on occasion, publishing a monthly web magazine of articles I'd written to keep a hand in my “real” career—35 years as a writer and editor—fixing meals, doing laundry, visiting with friends, and worshipping each Sunday with the nearby Culver Palms Church of Christ made up the rest of my life.

Oh, I felt the odd stiffness and pain that seemed normal at the advanced age of 69, but that day I felt so weak that it was hard

to pull myself up the stairs that connected our far-flung, multi-level campus. I glanced around quickly. Suddenly and without warning, I felt strangely disoriented. Where was I, and who was I coming to call out of class?

I panicked. I had to find out who I had come for and where she was, but my mind was a blank. Then I remembered. But it wasn't like a regular memory. It came slowly, like molasses on a cold day. I'd slipped the summons I'd written to call the student into my purse. It would tell me her name as well as the building and classroom she was in.

My hands trembled as I searched frantically for the yellow slip of paper. Yes, there it was, and there was her name. The slip also said what building and classroom she was in. Now if only I could find them. Eventually, I was able to pick her up and return to the office.

"We need to talk," I told Marvin, my boss, my mind a jumble of questions and concerns.

He looked at me closely. "Are you all right?"

"No, I'm not," I said. "Something is wrong."

"Take the rest of the day off if you're not feeling well. You can finish whatever you're working on in the morning."

Clearly I wasn't conveying the magnitude of the problem. "I need to go home," I told him, "but I may need a lot more time off than that."

It was obvious to me that suddenly I was not functioning; it seemed as if anybody could see it just by looking at me. "I need to

make some doctors' appointments, have some tests run. Something is seriously wrong, and I need to find out what it is and what, if anything, can be done about it."

Something was wrong, but not even I knew how wrong until I'd struggled through brain surgery, a seizure, pneumonia, retirement, and my 70th birthday—all within a year.

Those experiences were like a splash of cold water in my face; I was growing old. In fact, I was already old. And my whole self—mind and body—seemed to be falling apart at the same time.

What I didn't expect was that it would impact my entire being—emotionally and spiritually—as well as my family and friends. And it would mean the end of my working life, which would bring adjustments of its own.

I had always been healthy, outgoing and happy. I had felt close to God and had even worked for a church. I had been bright and energetic, but I could hardly recognize the weak, stumbling, confused, and depressed old woman I had become. I wasn't even sure I liked her.

Some physical and mental difficulties are to be expected as we age. But they usually don't come quite so fast or so dramatically as they did with me.

But God's timing is perfect—so much more than I realized at the time. Medical science, particularly brain science, had progressed so far that problems could be diagnosed and treated that previously would have been dismissed as hopeless.

According to *The State of Aging and Health in America 2013*, a publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the Department of Health and Human Service, “During the twentieth century, effective public health strategies and advances in medical treatment contributed to a dramatic increase in average life expectancy in the United States. The 30-year gain in life expectancy within the span of a century had never before been achieved. Many of the diseases that claimed our ancestors—including tuberculosis, diarrhea and enteritis, and syphilis—are no longer the threats they once were.”

I started with our family doctor. He ran a few tests and referred me to a neurologist. She sent me for an MRI and for neurocognitive testing. When I went back for my follow-up appointment, she showed me pictures of slices of my brain. Even *I* could see that one ventricle was thinner than the other.

That, she explained, was the result of extra cerebrospinal fluid, which was putting pressure on my brain. The technical name for the condition was normal pressure hydrocephalus, and the symptoms included mental impairment and mobility problems. The diagnosis certainly fit my experience.

The neurologist referred me to a neurosurgeon, who placed a shunt in my skull to drain the excess fluid into my abdomen, where it could be absorbed.

Frank and I talked and figured and planned. What if it didn’t go as advertised? What if this break from work became a permanent retirement? Taking a later-than-usual retirement meant that we

had paid enough into Social Security and had sufficient pension funds to be able to live on our current income. Even turning 70 wasn't the unmitigated disaster it seemed at first.

Nevertheless, the challenges of aging that I experienced that year and the faith it's taken to find meaning, purpose and significance in my life led me to meditate, pray, and seek the counsel of strong Christian brothers and sisters.

Despite the kindness of the people around me, I felt old, useless, and weak. I was sure my life was over. I was complaining to my friend, Margaret, about what a failure I felt I was. Margaret is an elder's wife, the mother of four incredible daughters, a woman of wisdom, and one of the sweetest spirits I know. She said, "Don't look at it that way. This is your victory lap."

I looked up the phrase online. A victory lap is a term used in motor sports to describe an extra lap of the race track after the end of a race. Driven at reduced speed, it allows the winning driver to celebrate his or her victory and the spectators to congratulate and honor him or her.

I loved the image of a winner at the end of my race, taking some extra time to savor my accomplishments, to thank God and the people who contributed to making my life special, and to forgive those who didn't. It's an opportunity to enjoy myself in a way I hadn't been able to in the crush of family and career responsibilities.

I struggled through a year of recovering and listening to God's voice in everything from finding identity without a job title to

strengthening muscles, rebuilding faith, and learning to trust a brain that had let me down. I even was able to share what I was learning by writing a Bible class curriculum on aging that I taught the following summer at the Culver Palms Church of Christ.

The class was called *Growing Old with God*, and it forms the basis of this book. There's an outline, together with instructions for using it for a class, in the back of this book. Mostly, it's for people like me who are confronting some of the difficulties that come with aging and seek, as I did, to be able to handle them with greater grace and joy. It discusses our need for a support network and how to grow one. It talks about our need to stay active and involved in life and shares ways to do that. It treats life and death and the legacy each of us is leaving for generations to come.

After all, I'm not the only one who's growing old. The whole population of the United States is aging rapidly. Our largest demographic, the Baby Boomers, the huge generation that follows mine, is retiring as well. I felt I had insights to share with a broader public.

The oldest baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, started turning 65 in 2011. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people in the U.S. who are 65 and older is expected to more than double from 40 million to 89 million by 2050. By 2030, older adults will account for roughly twenty percent of the U.S. population.

Much has been said about finishing well. This is my victory lap, and I want to enjoy it—to regain a sense of myself and my

purpose for still being here, to regain my peace and joy in Christ.

I pray that my experience and the lessons I've learned as a result of it will help you avoid some of the problems I've experienced and have a happier and more fulfilling victory lap. I pray that churches with aging populations will benefit from these discussions and from the contributions of their senior members, and that the older Christians will enjoy fuller lives and reduced distress at the prospect of aging.

What Does It Mean to Grow Old?

It's a Sunday morning. I wake up at 5:30—the usual time I get up these days. I no longer use an alarm clock but now wake up even earlier than I did with an alarm when I was working. I have hours before my daughter, Kathy, and granddaughter, Katyana, will pick me up for church.

A Bible verse is running through my head: “Establish the works of my hands” (Psalm 90:17). I ask God to continue bringing good from the work I've done over the years to serve Him and other people. Then I get up, unload the dish drainer, make coffee, and prepare breakfast.

I do the stretching exercises the physical therapist gave me when I was released from the hospital. I drink a big glass of water, write in my journal, and turn on the computer to check the weather—high of 71 and cloudy, which is about average for winter in Los Angeles.

I eat breakfast and am almost ready when Kathy drives up. A dab of lipstick, and we leave for worship several blocks away. There I meet with my brothers and sisters, sing, pray, laugh, and

listen to a sermon and the reading of God's Word.

We come home and make sandwiches for lunch. I show Kathy the scrapbook I'm making of family photos. I'm writing blurbs to identify key people in the photos and to tell stories I recall about them. I want the kids and Katyana to have a family history—my side of the family and Frank's before there's no one left to recognize the people in the photos or to remember their stories.

Fortunately for me, Frank's mother felt much the same way. Before she died, she compiled photos and letters written by her family through the generations that supply the information I need about his side of the family. My sister is the historian on my side. She does extensive research and is a member of several genealogical societies. She shares a lot about the Wesleys, LaRoes, Huxfords and Hales—the four families that make up our genetic heritage.

We hear about the photo exhibit Kathy and Katyana went to the night before and see photos of some of the art they enjoyed.

Seven-year-old Katyana has brought home a yellow balloon from church, and we sit around the living room, trying to keep it aloft. Katyana chases around, working off excess energy. The rest of us sit until the balloon wobbles near, then whack it like a volleyball to one of the other family members.

After a spirited game, with lots of laughs and a few near misses of objects around the room, I show Kathy the recipes I made my grocery list from this week. She decides on a dish she'd like us to prepare. We go to the kitchen and work together on a Mexican

casserole, then pop it in the oven, setting the timer for dinner. Katyana helps me set the table while it's cooking.

It's the good life.

The longer I live, the more important it becomes to live, not long, but well. The good life is a life of joy and gratitude, of learning and loving and being involved.

That's not the approach of our times. On television, commercials make it seem as if the important thing is to not show our age. The media tell us that we shouldn't want to look old. We need skin creams, hair dyes, and even facial surgery. Rather than respect older people, as is traditional in many cultures, our country has a negative view of age.

As a Christian, I feel it's important to be honest—to put forth the face I have to the world. I try to look decent, but not to hide the fact that I've been living and learning for a long time and just may have something to contribute.

Another set of commercials, for everything from walk-in bathtubs to home security systems, seems to want to frighten us. Our economy thrives on making people feel that they need to buy things to protect themselves from a dangerous world.

It is unnerving, even frightening, to grow old—especially when it seems as if you've suddenly become someone you don't recognize. It's not the way I'd ever seen myself before. I feel that our culture fails to respect me and other aging people for the contributions we have made—and still are making—to our society.

Most of the books I've read about aging emphasize finances. If

you have enough money to constantly travel or redecorate your home, you'll be happy. Money is important for supplying our basic necessities, but generally, I feel that the value of money has been greatly exaggerated in our culture, and the value of intangibles like love and joy and peace has been overlooked. Those are what we need for the good life.

None of us is growing younger. We're all growing older, which comes with certain challenges. With prayer and preparation, we can respond to those challenges with strength, joy, and renewed purpose.

Age is relative. What's old to one person may not seem old to another. Think back over the older people in your life when you were growing up. Just how old were they? They may have been as young as 30 or as old as 60. A 60-year-old person that age doesn't seem so old now that I'm over 70.

Time is relative that way. Remember how long it took for Christmas to come when you were a child? Now it almost takes you by surprise.

Aging took me by surprise. It seemed as if I were just going along enjoying life when suddenly, I was old.

I had never felt particularly old until I got sick. I had always either been young or seemed young for my age. But the year I had major surgery, I wasn't able to pretend any more.

The day I got home from the hospital, I started home health care and watched a movie. Kathy and Katyana came over, and Kathy brushed out my hair, which a nurse had braided to keep it

out of my face, and fixed dinner for Father's Day.

The next day, I watched another movie and called to make appointments with my family doctor, my neurologist, and my neurosurgeon, as I had been instructed me to do when I was released from the hospital.

Frank's brother called from Berkeley to see how I was doing. I told him I was doing so well that I knew I'd be back to normal in no time. I'm not sure whom I was trying to convince. I worked on my website, had sessions with my home health nurse and physical therapist, shampooed my hair, and watched yet another movie. (Obviously, I saw a lot of movies.)

Kathy was speaking at a conference for English professors up the coast in Monterey. We planned to tag along and keep Katyana while Kathy was in sessions. I encouraged Frank to go ahead with them. Our son, Robert, would be here to help me if I needed anything.

Then on Saturday, I had a seizure. Robert called 911, and I ended up back in the hospital for a second week. Frank and Kathy were on their way home when Robert reached them with the news.

A month later, I got up after the best sleep I'd had in weeks then worked on my website links and a grocery list. Frank made breakfast, and I started writing in the new journal Kathy had given me for Christmas. Its cover was the softest leather, and it had a picture of the Trevi Fountain in Rome on it. The pages were cool, smooth, and easy to write on.

I thanked God for the good care the doctors and nurses had

given me. I thanked Him for both my family and my church family and asked blessings on each one. “I ask this of You who is God alone, the great Unutterable One, the Incomprehensible One, to Whom all governments are subject and every authority bows, before Whom all that is high falls down and remains silent, at whose voice demons take flight and beholding Whom all creation surrenders in silent adoration,” I prayed.

The next day a neighbor brought me a bunch of yellow roses, and the florist delivered a fruit and flower basket from friends at church. A few days later, another friend came with lasagna for our dinner. And one of the elders of my church emailed that he’d probably stop by the next evening.

The appraiser was coming to look at our house that morning, and the physical therapist was scheduled for another session. I bathed and got ready for them. I prayed for friends who were ill and for two who had been recently widowed. The elder came by, and one of our ministers made a short visit.

Despite the good things that were happening, the time just after I came home from the hospital was filled with emotional ups and downs, encouragements and discouragements, a sense of being close to God and simultaneously feeling alienated.

Because of my illness, I was forced to retire. I’d always enjoyed my work, so I didn’t eagerly await retirement as some people do. I didn’t know what to do with myself. In fact, I wasn’t sure just who “myself” was.

It was around this time, when I was feeling low and full of

self-doubt, that my friend, Margaret christened this period as my “victory lap.” The phrase caused something to break loose in my mind. There *was* good here. I was having trouble seeing it, but I started looking more closely. It was a chance to celebrate, to accept congratulations, and to finish stronger. A new, more biblically based way of looking at age, it was the first step in my year-long process of changing my attitude, and as a result, my capabilities.

It meant that, in a sense, my race was over. Jesus had won it on my behalf when I obediently accepted Him in faith. “Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

It reminded me of the words of the writer to the Hebrews: “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 entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). That writer pictures our lives as a cosmic race.

When I began writing this book, the 2014 Winter Olympics were taking place in Sochi, Russia. Vast crowds were watching as athletes pushed themselves to do their personal best.

To the writer of Hebrews, the crowds who observe our performance in the race of life are all the faithful who have gone before us who are listed in Hebrews 11—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Israelites, Rahab, the judges, King David, and the prophets and martyrs.

With such an audience looking on, we want to free ourselves

from entanglements like sins, worries, and material things, so we may finish the race of our life well.

One night, Frank and I watched the downhill skiing competition held at the Rosa Khutor Mountain Ski Center on the Aibga Ridge. The Olympic Alpine skiing routes total 3,500 meters in length, with a 46 degree slope. The Center accommodates 18,000 spectators.

We saw the blue lines on the course in which the skiers had to stay inside as they flew down the course, as high as three Empire State Buildings at speeds over 80 mph, making football-field-length jumps. The best idea most of us may have of what it's like to ski the course is to watch former Olympic skier and BBC commentator Gordon Bell, who skied it without poles but with a hand-held camera.¹

Our course, like that of the skiers, has been set before us. God knows the limits of our lives. He's set the boundaries, like those blue lines between which the skiers have to stay. I was getting ahead of myself, deciding that I was useless, that I was dying. As long as we're alive, God has a purpose for us. Our part is merely to get rid of anything that would obstruct us in our flight—greed, jealousy, bitterness, immorality, lack of peace, or lack of love—and to patiently trust Him to reveal that course to us.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Though it's important to read the Old Testament for context

and the epistles for practical guidance, the heart of Scripture is the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Those are the four accounts of Jesus' life as a person here on earth.

Jesus is our example of the perfect life of faith, and if we keep His example before us as we live, we can't go wrong. "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3).

Though our lives may not be all we'd like them to be, though weariness and discouragement may challenge us, we haven't faced all that He did. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

*"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
And do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
Because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
And he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."*

~ Hebrews 12:4-6

The challenges that confront us are a part of God's discipline of us, His children, aimed at strengthening us and preparing us for the long haul. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time," the writer tells us. "Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

Olympic athletes are among the best in the world. They have been trained and encouraged by coaches to be strong, nimble,

and flexible so they can turn in stellar performances. God is our coach. He's not some stern judge watching from Heaven, hoping to catch us doing something wrong. He's our loving coach who trains and encourages us and wants the best for us. "Therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed" (Hebrews 12:13).

I had almost given up on the race too early. I had lost sight of the possibility of healing. But that was what God had in store for me. Though I've learned since that a year is about average for healing after brain surgery, it would take the longest year of my life, but healing did come.

Jesus has already accomplished our victory. We have merely to accept what He's done for us by faith and to continue in that faith until the end. Spiritual growth is a process that should continue throughout our lives to the extent that the oldest among us is the most spiritual, most loving, most joyous, most open, patient, and kind person of all. She should be willing to listen, learn, and change. He should be compassionate, single-hearted, pure, and peaceful.

What is your concept of age? "What we think about a person influences how we will perceive him; how we perceive him influences how we will behave toward him; and how we behave toward him ultimately shapes who he is," sociologists Kenneth J. and Mary M. Gergen write in the *Social Gerontology of Aging*.²

We can have a bad self image if we let others set it for us. Many people today go through life primarily in the company of others their own age. The young and old rarely have meaningful interactions outside of the family. Therefore, many have a stereotypical view of older people.

That view may resemble Maxine from greeting card fame and pop culture: negative and miserable. Here are some typical Maxine-isms:³

“I’m going South for the winter,” she says. “Actually some parts of me are headed there already.”

“Don’t let aging get you down. It’s too hard to get back up!”

There are negative aspects to aging, and we can concentrate on them if we insist. We can moan, complain, and turn into cranky old men and women.

Maxine does, however, say several things that are helpful:

“If you woke up breathing, congratulations. You have another chance.” She’s certainly right there. So long as we’re alive, we have a chance to make something of the time God has given us.

“Inside every older person is a younger person wondering what happened.” Perhaps the most surprising thing to me about aging is realizing how little I seem to have changed inside. I still *feel* young, despite the way I look and the number of birthdays I’ve celebrated.

That is Maxine, and her view of aging represents that of many people today. But what does the Bible say about age? In the class

I taught, I distributed strips of paper with Bible verses on them. The passages for this lesson were Job 12:12, Psalm 92:12-14, Proverbs 16: 31, Isaiah 46:3-4 and Titus 2:1-5. Each person in the class who had one read it and explained what the passage was saying about age.

The passage from Job says, “Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (Job 12:12). I had always thought so, but now the brain that I had counted on seemed compromised. What did that mean for the wisdom and understanding I was supposed to have accumulated through the years? Maybe I just had to trust God’s Word, even when it didn’t seem that way to me.

The Psalmist writes: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Psalm 92:12-14). Having grown up in the dry climate of West Texas, I understood that one. It recalls the freshness of rain after dry, dusty heat. With God’s help, I still might have some freshness in me.

The wise man wrote in Proverbs: “Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31). Years ago, I determined not to color my hair, but to let it gray naturally. I tend to be a natural person. I had my kids naturally, breast-fed, and trusted God that everything would work as advertised. I haven’t been disappointed on that count so far, so I should resist temptation now, and enjoy my crown of silver.

But most significant to me were Isaiah's words: "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you" (Isaiah 46:3-4).

God will take care of me. He will sustain and carry and rescue me in this final part of my life as He has through the rest of it.

I grew up in the little church in Happy, Texas, with Maude Bowe as my Bible class teacher. Ms. Bowe emphasized learning Scripture. I went to the public school there with Lela Foster Moudy as an English teacher who gave extra credit for outside reading. She gave me extra credit for reading through the Bible when I was in high school.

I studied the Bible in college, first at Abilene Christian and then at Pepperdine. Then I worked for *20th Century Christian Magazine*, where I was thrilled to discover that I could be paid to study Scripture. Their wording still flits through my mind on almost any subject.

The God that I met in Scripture was the God I had given myself to in baptism when I was 13—the one I had talked with in my prayers. He had sustained me throughout my life, and I knew that He would continue to sustain me. He would make sense of the pain and confusion, the sorrow and loss. He would help me find the victory in these, the waning years of my life.

Paul, writing to Titus in the second chapter of his epistle, says:

“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).

I am deeply grateful as I look back over a life spent teaching children, women, and even some men through my writing and speaking engagements at women’s retreats and college lecture-ships all over the country. I have had wonderful opportunities to teach what is good. I have trained younger women to love their husbands and children, both in word and by example.

The high point of my time since my surgery came when Frank and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. After a rocky start, we learned to love each other increasingly as the years went by.

One thing that made our marriage work is that Frank is interesting and principled. I’ve enjoyed being married to him, and I’ve learned a lot from him. A good and loving husband and father, he has encouraged and supported me in everything I’ve attempted—and does to this day.

So much of our experience of age depends on our attitude. It depends on our definition of the good life. Is it money, position, looks? These can, and usually do, fail. Is it joy and relationships

and staying close to God? These never fail.

In our Bible class, we wrote in our journals about our childhoods and the older people who impacted our lives. I wrote about my paternal grandmother, Granny, Ethel Wesley. When I was a child, Granny probably made the greatest impact on me of any older person. She took me to church before my parents began attending.

She was interested in everything, and she read a lot—especially the Bible and *National Geographic* magazines. She was interested in outer space and always wanted to go there.

She was creative and made things such as braided rag rugs, quilts, crocheted and knitted work, and her own clothes. She made candles and soap and decorated mirrors and other items with sea shells. She also had a plum tree and a large garden filled with flowers and vegetables, the harvest of which she used to can and make jelly.

I vividly remember the day I saw a tarantula at the side of her house, between the fence and the road. Granny got a jelly jar and punched holes in the top of it with a hammer and nail. Then she squatted down and jumped along behind that tarantula until she'd caught it with a special direction to me, "for you to take to school for science class."

I was scared, but Granny was fearless.

Just as Granny blessed my life in her later years, God gives each of us who is still alive a victory lap. How can we express our gratitude to Him for that special gift? How can we not waste it?

How can we use that extra time He's given us to glorify Him and to help others?

I am learning to treasure my victory lap by looking back over my life with gratitude to God and the people who made it possible and pleasant, and forgiving those who didn't; praying to God to bring good from it—to “establish the work of my hands,” and to forgive the wrong I've done and wash it away in Jesus' blood; and continuing to do what I'm able—writing this book, maintaining my website, collecting family photos and stories for my children and grandchild, and praying for those in need. Among these endeavors, I try to be alert to other possibilities for service.

Others my age may not be able to do all these things, and there are plenty of things I can't do. We need to accept our limitations and do what we're able. Even if we're bedridden, we can pray. Prayer has tremendous power. We can count our blessings; gratitude helps lift our spirits. And we can encourage someone else who may not have it as easy as we do.

What does it mean to grow old? It means a lot. It means that you'll experience limitations you've never known before. It means that other people will look at you in ways they never have before. It means that you'll have less energy than you're used to having. It means that you'll remember some things with remarkable clarity, but may not be able to recall something that happened yesterday.

And it doesn't mean so much. You're still basically the same person you've always been, with the same strengths and weaknesses. You feel much the same way—no better, though often

not a lot worse. You have less energy, but you're willing to let more things go because you realize that all those things that always seemed so urgent aren't really all that pressing.

You're more accepting—with yourself and other people. You have a clearer sense of what's important and what really isn't.

I may not appreciate the attitudes those around me have about age, but I don't worry about others' opinions as much as I once did. I'm grateful for the work that's been done toward equal treatment without regard to age, but I try to show by the way I live that I deserve to be treated with respect.

As I do that, I find my attitude about age changing. I don't think so much about what I *can't* do as about what I *can*, and I am grateful. I take my eyes off myself and focus on Jesus and others. Life is still pretty good—even though I'm growing old, I'm retired, and physically and mentally I'm not what I once was.

What I am is God's child. With my eyes on Jesus and the victory He's won for me, I can finish the race that is set before me with patient trust and confidence. When everything seemed to fall apart, it was an opportunity to consider how I wanted to reconstruct my life. So now, at age 71, I'm just beginning to live the good life, to enjoy my victory lap.

Discussion Questions

1. How has your concept of what it means to be old changed over the years?
2. What age seemed old when you were younger? What does now?
3. When did you first become aware of being old? What prompted it?
4. For what and whom in your past are you grateful? Whom do you need to forgive? Make plans to do that. If the person is no longer living, turn the situation over to God in prayer, and trust Him to handle it on your behalf.
5. What's the difference between the way you look on the outside and the way you feel inside?
6. What advantages might there be to aging?

Bible Study

1. "Is not _____ found among the aged? Does not long life bring _____" (Job 12:12).
2. "The righteous will flourish like a _____, they will grow like a _____ of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will _____ in the courts of our God. They will still bear _____ in old age, they will stay _____ and _____" (Psalm 92:12-14).
3. "_____ is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a _____ life" (Proverbs 16:31).

4. "Listen to me, Oh house of Jacob, all you who remain in the house of Israel, you whom I have _____ since you were _____, and have _____ since your birth. Even to your _____ and _____ I am he who will _____ you. I have _____ you and will _____ you and I will _____ you" (Isaiah 46:3-4).

5. "Teach the older men to be _____, worthy of _____, _____ and sound in _____, in _____ and in _____." And teach the older women to be _____ in the way they live, not to be _____ or addicted to _____, but to teach what is _____. Then they can train the younger women to _____ their husbands and children, to be _____ and _____, to be _____ at home, to be _____, and to be _____ to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:1-5).

Write in Your Journal

Write in your journal about an older person who made a deep impression on you as a child. Who was it? What did that person do? What does that tell you about growing older and how to use your victory lap to glorify God and help other people?

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.cbssports.com/olympics/eye-on-olympics/24437377/video-see-what-its-like-to-ski-sochi-downhill-course>.
- 2 <https://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/gersopsy.html>.
- 3 <http://www.hallmark.com/online/maxine/about/>.