

Introduction

I read a little article this past week titled *You Know You're Old When . . .* According to it, you know you're old when: **"(1) It takes longer to rest than to get tired; (2) You realize caution is the only thing you care to exercise; (3) You lean over to pick something up off the floor and ask your self if there is anything else you need to do while you're down there; (4) Everything that works hurts and what doesn't hurt doesn't work; (5) Your mind makes contracts your body can't keep; (6) Your knees buckle and your belt doesn't; and (7) Your back goes out more than you do."**

Those things might make you think old age is bad. But, according to the texts we read earlier, it isn't. Psalms 92:14; 103:5; Proverbs 16:31; and 20:29 teach us that we can make our olden years golden years and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Old Age

Look at the terms **"old age"** in Psalm 92:14, **"your years"** in Psalm 103:5; **"gray head"** in Proverbs 16:31; and **"old men"** in Proverbs 20:29. It's clear what those texts are about – old age.

Let me ask you a question, which I'm directing to men only of course. Are you old? For those of us at the extremes of age, 15 and 85, for instance, the answer is clear-cut. For many of us in between, however, it isn't. That's because some age-related changes start as early as the 20's and others as late as the 60's or 70's. People begin to lose their ability to hear high-frequency tones in their 20's, for instance, and their ability to hear low frequency tones in their 60's. That makes determining whether or not we're old more difficult for some of us. So, I'll use the Golden Buckeye Card standard. We're old if we're over 60.

Those of you in your teens or twenties can't even conceive yourself being that old, 60. That seems ancient to you I know but guess what? Unless you die prematurely, you're someday going to be 60. You're

someday going to think twice about bending over to pick something up. Which makes old age a topic that is relevant to all of us, even people like me who are 30 or 40 years from it. So let's give it some serious thought by examining the texts we read earlier. Keep in mind as we do that "old people" are what all of us either are or will be.

The Excellence of Old Age

Let's start with Proverbs 20:29. This verse ought to be above the door of every senior center in America.

In the first line, Solomon observes that the glory of young men is their strength. I compare how far I could throw a baseball in my 20's and how far I can throw one now. It isn't even close. We're obviously much stronger in our youth than our old age. But Solomon intends for strength here to be representative. It stands for all the desirable characteristics of youth.

In the second line of 20:29, Solomon observes that the honor of old men is their gray hair. More than 40% of American men have some gray hair by the age of 40. Notice I said by the age of 40, not the age of 20. Gray hair has come to represent the dignity, wisdom, and grace that come with maturity and experience. In verse 29, therefore, it stands for all the desirable characteristics of old age.

Putting the two lines together, Solomon's point is a vital one. Each age has its appointed excellence. Whether we're 8 years old, 38, or 88, our age, right now, has desirable characteristics that go along with it. I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "**Age is not important – unless you're a cheese.**" That is the powerful teaching of 20:29. How old we are isn't important because each age has its appointed excellence.

Proverbs 16:31 reveals the implication of that to old age. Notice what Solomon says a gray head is. It's "**a crown of glory.**" The Hebrew word that my NASB translates "**glory**" is better translated "**beauty.**" Do you get what Solomon is saying here. It's that old age is a beautiful thing. We use a metaphor that says it differently but the meaning is the

same. We say that old age is the “Golden Years” and that’s right, it is. There is an excellence in it that makes it beautiful or golden.

Not everyone experiences that of course. Sadly, many if not most don’t. I’ve had at least 20 senior citizens advise me, warn me, **“There’s nothing golden about these years.”** The fact is that a lot of old people are miserable for just that reason – because they’re old. But the good news is that you and I don’t have to be. There are two things that we, as disciples of Jesus, can do to make our olden years golden years, both of which I want to discuss.

Be Enthusiastic

First, be enthusiastic. Robert Schuller once said that age isn’t as much a matter of years as it is a matter of enthusiasm. We can be old at 18 or young at 80 depending on the enthusiasm we have.

The two Psalms we read confirm that he’s right. 92:12-15 identifies several characteristics of a righteous person. One of those, in verse 14, is that he or she will yield fruit in old age just as a young and vibrant fruit tree does. 103:5 makes a similar point. It pictures God giving us youth-like vim and vigor in our old age. It’s obvious what these verses *are not* talking about, the energy and strength of young people, which old people can’t have. What they *are* talking about is the enthusiasm of young people, which old people can have.

When I was in seminary, I did an off-campus ministry at a County Nursing Home. The chaplain I worked under there was Perry Prather. Perry was an absolutely vibrant person. He had a drive for Jesus and His kingdom that was unexcelled by anyone I’ve ever met. You would have thought he was 18 but he wasn’t. He was 84, older than most of the people to whom he was ministering. He epitomized what Psalms 92:14 and 103:5 are all about. We can have enthusiastic attitudes that keep us young for as long as we live. Here are three of those attitudes.

The first is, **“I’m never too old to grow.”** It’s a fundamental principle of human life that we can and should grow in competence,

character, and achievement. That principle is just as operative when we're 80 as when we're 18. We talk about having hardening of the arteries in our old age. But there's something even worse – hardening of the attitudes. We can't help the first of those but we can the second. We should stay flexible and keep growing until the day that we die.

Howard Hendricks tells about the best teacher that he ever had bar none. It was a Sunday school teacher of his named Mrs. Simpson. One of the things that made Mrs. Simpson a great teacher, he says, was that she herself never stopped growing and developing. She went to the Holy Land at the age of 83, for example, with a group of NFL football players. Later that year, her daughter found her dead one morning slumped over her desk with the light on above her and a piece of paper in front of her. Guess what was on that paper? It was her goals for the next 10 years. She had died while writing them out the evening before. I just love that. She was 83 years old and still growing.

There's a second enthusiastic attitude that can keep us young for as long as we live, **"I'm never too old to start."** The lives of a lot of old people are nothing more than a series of endings. But it doesn't have to be that way for us. Our lives can be a series of beginnings instead – if we start things that will add value to our lives and the lives of others.

Consider these facts. Cato began to study Greek at the age of 80. Grandma Moses began to paint at the age of 76. George Mueller began to conduct evangelistic meetings at the age of 70. Colonel Sanders began to sell chicken at the age of 68. And Julius Bartholomew, Ginny Queen's father, began to use computers at the age of 91.

Two years ago, an 80 year old asked me for copies of the *First Aim* and *Sermon on the Mount* studies. **"I've never really studied the Bible,"** he said, **"But it's time I start."** Old people, don't buy into the idea that the best is behind you because it isn't. It's a lie of the devil. The truth is that we're never too old to start things that improve life.

A third enthusiastic attitude is this, **"I'm never too old to enjoy life."** I know that old people have a host of aches and pains and that

they can't do a lot of things that they used to do. But they can enjoy life nonetheless.

Helen Keller told about a friend of hers who said he enjoyed life more at 80 than he did at 25. She asked him how he was able to do so and he told her, **"Never count how many years you have but how many interests you have."**

That is the secret to enjoying life. Don't count our years but our interests. Let's not grow old and stale and become fixated on aches, pains, and medical procedures. Let's broaden our horizons instead and take an interest in the challenging, exciting, and wondrous things that life has to offer us. I think of my wife's grandmother, who was still conversing with us about God, history, politics, and nature when she died at the age of 99.

Helen Keller, in her 80's, said it this way: **"It is as natural for me to believe that the richest harvest of happiness comes with age as that true sight and hearing are within, not without. I am glad I still have a vivid curiosity about the world I live in."**

So that's the first thing we have to do to make our olden years golden years. Have enthusiastic attitudes. Grow, start, and enjoy life.

Locate the Body

There's a second thing we have to do to. Locate our body.

Our body is the focal point of our presence in the world. We came into existence in union with it. Its primary function is spiritual. God designed it to engage Him and His kingdom.

The problem is that the vast majority of people take the body out of that spiritual context. As Dallas Willard explains it, they mislocate it. They give it a place it shouldn't have. They make it the center of their experience and life and focus their outlook almost entirely on it.

Doing that betrays the body. It robs it of the spiritual resources that sustain its proper functioning. That in turn betrays the people themselves and leads them to misery and pain. That betrayal manifests

itself in the young. We see it in their sexualization of practically everything. It also manifests itself in the aging and old. We see it in the fear, shame, and anger with which they regard what's happening to their body. They view its decline (aging) and cessation (death) as the ultimate insults from which there is no recovery. The young and old have this in common. They're preoccupied with their bodily life, which in turn diminishes their spiritual and psychological lives.

Many old people are known for dominating conversations with all the details of their aches, pains, doctor's visits, medical procedures, and so on. Why do they do that? It's because they mislocate their body.

But if we want our olden years to be golden years, we have to locate it instead. We have to give it its proper place. That's what the verse at the top of the bulletin, 1 Corinthians 6:20, means, "**Glorify God in your body.**" We recognize that its primary function is spiritual, to engage God and His kingdom. So we commit it to the bodily activities that do that, which I've explained in detail many times before. We know as we do that as our earthly body fades our resurrection body approaches. We know that when our earthly body ceases, we will engage God and His kingdom far more fully without it than with it. Consequently, we don't worry about what is happening or will happen to it – sickness, repulsiveness, aging, or even death. We don't live in fear of it and what it might do to us. That's at the heart of what makes so many old people so miserable. They live in fear of their body and what it might do to them. But locating it, committing it to its primary spiritual function, removes that fear and replaces it with peace.

Conclusion

I leave you in closing with the words of the celebrated author Oliver Wendell Holmes, "**To be seventy years young is more cheerful and hopeful than to be forty years old.**" What he implies is profound. We can be 70 or even 90 years young. Be enthusiastic and locate your body. Your olden years will be golden years if you do.