

Aging Gracefully  
Titus 2:1-5  
January 31, 2021

Do you know which segment of our population grows fastest? As of 2016, the fastest growing segment of our population is the seniors, the people over 65. Lower birth rates and increased longevity have led to this rapid growth of seniors, not just in the United States, but across the world.<sup>1</sup>

The life expectancy in 2020 at birth in the United States is 78.9.<sup>2</sup> What this means is a child who is born in this country in the year 2020 is expected to live about 79 years. This includes all the people who may die of accidents, wars, or diseases. So, if a child born in 2020 does not have any of that then she/he will live a lot longer than 79 years, possibly over 100 years.

Even now, most of people who are relatively healthy without major illness live more than 90 years. For the first time in history, four-generation families are becoming commonplace.

Because people live longer and healthier, many older adults want longevity with perpetual youth and health despite their actual age. What is youthfulness? It is having mind and body in a good condition, such as retentive memory, sufficient physical strength, and supple skin, until the end of puberty. Puberty lasts until the age of 30.

Can anyone maintain their youthfulness until they die of old age? Of course, not. Starting age 30, we can see the evidence of our body beginning to age, and we cannot stop the aging process. We can only slow it down.

A British historian, Peter Laslett (1915-2001) developed the idea of dividing a human life into four stages. He called them “Four Ages.” The First Age is the period from birth through completing education before the first full-time employment. It is an era of dependence. During this age we are totally dependent on other people for the basic necessities of life. The focus of our energy at this stage is on education and building various skills. It is a growing stage. The length of this age differs among people, depending on their personal choices. The people

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/snapshot-fast-growing-us-older-population.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1040079/life-expectancy-united-states-all-time/#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20160%20years%2C%20life%20expectancy%20%28from,have%20decreased%20by%20so%20much%20during%20this%20time.>

who graduate from high school and go into work force will end this age much earlier than the ones who go to college or graduate school.

The Second Age is a period of independence, maturity and responsibility. This is the period of earning income, establishing careers, raising children, and paying mortgages. This is the time to live as an adult. This is also the time when future plans for life after retirement is drawn out.

The Third Age is the life after retirement. We used to consider retirement as the beginning of “old age.” But it is really the beginning of the “era of personal fulfillment”<sup>3</sup> according to Laslett. The life after retirement is the period of creative aging where most meaningful living can take place. Most people past retirement are healthy enough, wealthy enough and well enough to enjoy many decades of life ahead of them. The important question for this age is “What are you going to do with the next 25 or 30 or even more years.

Some futurists predict that in the near future, a normal life expectancy will reach 120-140 years. If this comes true then the Third Age will be the longest and possibly the most productive period of our lives.

The Fourth Age is the period in which we will lose mobility and be under the care of family or others due to age-related diseases, such as dementia, Alzheimer’s, osteoporosis, and others. It is final dependence, debility, and death. Statistically, however, this phase is increasingly coming late and lasting briefly. I believe that is good news.

Based on this information, graceful aging depends on how we live the Third Age. Other Ages are important, too. But the Third Age could be the most important.

Paul, in his letter to Titus, gives an instruction as to how we should live in the Third Age. He tells the men in the Third Age to be “temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.”

He also tells the women in the Third Age to be “reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink. They are to teach what is good to the younger generation.” In other words, both men and women in the Third Age need to be models to the younger generation.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 1991.

How do we do that? In 1 Peter 1, we find these words: “Discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ... as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”<sup>4</sup>

Peter says, “Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.” That is, we are to be mindful of the second coming of Christ. We are to live each and every day expecting Jesus to return.

When we read Peter’s first letter, we can sense that he is preoccupied with the second coming of Christ. In Chapter 1:7 Peter says that we are to live in such a way that our faith “may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In Chapter 2:12 he says that we are to live holy lives so that “we may, by good works which others observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” There are other passages similar to these. Peter says we are to live each day with an anticipation of Christ’s return.

Why is living with the anticipation of Christ’s second coming important? Because when you know it, when you expect Jesus to return at any moment, you will be living for Jesus. This anticipation will lead to sanctification. “He who called you is holy, (therefore) be holy yourselves in all your conduct.” We are to conform to the character of God, the holiness of God.

Remember the fact that God not only has a purpose for our present, but also purpose for our future. 1 Peter 1:17 says, “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each person’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear.” Every day we live is recorded in God’s file of our lives. And there will be a judgment for all our works.

Hebrews 9:27 says, “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Now, each of us will face judgment. For us who have faith in Christ, this will not be a judgment of our salvation. Instead, it will be a judgment of our service. We are going to be judged according to our works.

Living the Third Age gracefully is to be a model in every way, to be solid in faith, sound in love and strong in endurance. It is to be reverent in behavior and be a model in what is good and to teach that to others.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1:13a-16

Old age is cherished in almost everything: ancient castles, antique furniture, old artifacts, and vintage wines. Old age is cherished in almost everything. Will it be cherished in you? How will you make it to be meaningful? The best way to make your Third Age meaningful is to give of yourself, to share what you have and have accumulated – your skills, your knowledge, your wisdom, your faith.

I know many of you volunteer in various ways. That's wonderful! Continue to do that. Continue to share your faith with others. Show others how you deal with your difficulties and challenges. Show others how you continue to trust the Lord even in the midst of your hardships, or in the face of major illnesses, or in times of disappointment. Living such a life is meaningful and honorable. May your Third Age be blessed richly with meaning and purpose!