

Graceful Aging
Isaiah 46:3-4
January 29, 2020

As of July 1, 2015, according to the United States Census Bureau, we had 47.8 million senior citizens in the United States.¹ That number was 1.6 million more than in 2014.² In recent years, we have been having about 1.5 million more senior citizens each and every year. It has been about 4½ years since July 2015. So, we can estimate that we have well over 54 million senior citizens currently living in the United States. In 2010, we had 53,364 centenarians living in the United States. Now in 2020, we are expected to have a lot more centenarians than that, and that number will continue to increase.

We have a science, gerontology, dedicated to the well-being of the elderly. With the advancement of science and medicine, better food and technology, people live longer and healthier. As we live longer, one of the things that concerns us is a mental breakdown, dementia. Currently we have about 5 million American senior citizens who are suffering dementia. That is roughly about 9 percent of the senior population. While 5 million is a large number, it is still very possible for most of us to remain alert, sharp, productive and creative until the end of our lives.

The late actress, Marie Dressler (1868-1934) once said, “It’s not how old you are, but how you are old that counts.”³ She was right. It is the quality of life that really matters.

In one of Robert Browning’s (1812-1889) poems we find these words:

Grow old along with me.
The best is yet to be.
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His Hand
Who sayeth, “A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid!”⁴

Growing old is inevitable. It’s an unavoidable process that begins at birth. The question is how do we deal with it, how do we cope, how do we grow old gracefully?

¹ Senior citizens refer to the people whose age is 65 and above.

² <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2017/cb17-ff08.html>

³ From Robert G. Tuttle’s sermon “Why Fear Growing Old?”, www.esermons.com

⁴ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43775/rabbi-ben-ezra>

In Psalm 90, which is attributed to Moses, we find these words:

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or you have formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (vss. 1-2)

It talks about the eternity of God.

Then it mentions the frailty of humanity. It says:

“You sweep men away in the sleep of death, they are like new grass of the morning: though in the morning it springs up new; by evening, it is dried and withered...All our days pass away under your wrath.” (vss. 5-6, 9)

Fragile, frail, tenuous – that’s human life.

Then it gives us a challenging call, a plea, a prayer.

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”
(verse 12)

How should we number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom? What does it mean to number our days aright? How should we spend the last few years of our lives that it may be meaningful, graceful and respectable? How do we cope with aging, not the aging of others, but our own? How do we grow old gracefully?

In the Book of Isaiah, we read about the Lord’s promise to the Israelites. He promises that he would sustain them, carry them, and rescue them from their beginning to the end. In other places God gives promises that he would never let his people be out of his sight or reach. God gives the same promise to us. He will never abandon us; but he will sustain us, carry us and save us. He will be with us throughout this life and the next. We, who have faith in Christ will be protected, sustained, carried, and saved by God. So, we are secured in this life and the next. But the question still remain.

The question is how do we grow old gracefully? I have a few suggestions.

First, choose words carefully. This applies to all ages, but this is particularly important as we grow older. Sometimes a few careless words we say can hurt our

loved ones deeply. If this happens, we may never recover from that. A few harsh words can destroy a relationship; and it may never be repaired.

Let us be careful about what we say and how we say it. Words are powerful. They can either encourage or discourage. They can either hurt or heal. The Proverbs say, “Gentle words turn away wrath; and bring health and life. But harsh words stir up anger and crush the spirit.”⁵ Choose the words carefully. When you speak, always speak with compassion in a spirit of encouragement.

Second, do not compare. Let us not compare our present condition with that of others. Do not compare your physical condition with that of others. Do not compare your financial condition with that of others. Do not compare even if your conditions are much better than that of others,. Comparing can make you either envious or haughty. Let us not compare our children with other children. Let us not compare our present condition with our past glory. If we have glorious past, then thank the Lord and celebrate the past, but don’t compare it with our present condition.

Third, keep boundaries. Those who have children are parents for life. As we get old, there are times when our children ask for our help, especially financial help. It would be good if you can help, but when you help, do it in such a way that your children will know that they cannot continue to depend on you. When they keep coming back for more help, it would be burdensome for you and it will not be good for them. If you have a lot of money and you can continue to help then it might be okay, but if that’s not the case, you need to establish a boundary. If your child keeps coming back for more help, say something like, “This will be the last time I will help you” and keep your word.

Fourth, invest yourself in new things. We have so much information on the internet, especially on You Tube. There are tons of things you can learn from watching You Tube videos. If you are not familiar with computers, maybe you can start now. You can learn about history, art, music, different cultures, you name it.

Whatever it may be, invest yourself in learning new things.

Fifth, make a plan for the next day. I am not asking you to make a grand plan for a distant future. Just make a plan for tomorrow. Every night, write down what you are going to do tomorrow. It adds excitement. You are looking forward to the next day. And when you do that, you will discover that each day is really a

⁵ Proverbs 15:1, 4.

new day. Each day comes with a purpose. Every day we have 1440 minutes for new things, new thoughts, new ideas, and new experiences.

Sixth, be thankful. Getting old is a privilege. It means we still have an opportunity to be alive. Who cares whether you are sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, or hundred,? What really matters is how old you feel. If you are old enough to lose fear and do what you want and what you feel, that is a blessing. So, be thankful each and every day. It is the gift God has given you.

Let us continue to grow mentally, intellectually, and with different skills. Let us always be thankful for the day we have.