

Regrets? Me?
Genesis 47:7-10
January 20, 2019

The former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Benjamin Disraeli was a man who had both fame and power. But as he reflected his life in the old age, this is what he said. “Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret.”¹ He concluded old age as a regret. What he meant was that as he reflected on his own life he remembered many things that he regretted.

Youth is the gift of nature and old age is the result of one’s life. Muhammad Ali once said, “Old age is just a record of one’s whole life.”²

A little girl was sitting on her grandmother's lap and saw her wrinkled face. Out of curiosity she reached out her hand and touched grandma’s face. As she did that, grandma said, “Those are my wrinkles. They are the signs that I'm getting old.” The little girl asked, “Grandma, do wrinkles hurt?”

Do wrinkles hurt? What a loaded question! Is it easy being old? What have you experienced in life that gives you all those lines on your face? What joy have you experienced? What sufferings have you endured? What pains are you carrying? Is it easy getting old? Do wrinkles hurt?

America is getting old. Currently people over 65 make up a little over 15 percent of the US population. Within fifteen years, they will reach 20 percent.³ As medical technology continues to advance and food gets better, we will live longer and healthier. Senior citizens are the wave of the future.

Some people think that most older people are sickly. The fact is that 75 percent of senior citizens are very healthy, healthy enough to engage in normal activities. They travel, engage in active sports and volunteer in their communities. They enjoy their lives. Most people live 20 or more years after their retirement. Most of them are very active in their lives.

The older people’s intelligence or the ability to reason does not decline very much. While memory will sometimes falter a bit, and the reasoning a bit slower at times, their judgment is as sharp as ever or even getting better because of experience.

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_disraeli_136860

² https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/old_age

³ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-100.html>

If the Bible has anything to say about old age, it says, “Gray hair is a crown of glory. It is gained by living a godly life.”⁴ The Bible says the old age is something to be proud of.

But still, is there anyone who really wants to get old? People say, “Getting old is better than the alternative.” But really? I am sure when they say “alternative,” they mean death. Please don’t get me wrong; I am not promoting death. But for Christians, the alternative will be heaven. It will be an eternal peace with God.

God said, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away.”⁵ This is the alternative. The alternative is not so bad.

God’s Word has a lot to say about heaven. But it also has a lot to say about aging. In the Bible we discover that the Lord has a gracious attitude toward aging and the aged.

“The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the glory of the old.”⁶ That is what the Bible says. What an unusual idea in the world where people praise youth.

We despise getting old, but not the Lord. The Lord praises the old age and God promises his care for the old.

He said, “I will be your God throughout your whole life – until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.”⁷

But no matter what the Lord promises old age could be filled with regrets like that of Benjamin Disraeli’s.

When Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt, he stood before the King of Egypt, Pharaoh. He asked Jacob, “How old are you?” And Jacob answered, “I have lived one hundred and thirty years. It has not been a long life but it has been

⁴ Proverbs 16:31

⁵ Revelation 21:3-4.

⁶ Proverbs 20:29

⁷ Isaiah 46:4.

difficult.” I sense a lot of pain in those words. One hundred and thirty years, not exactly a short life; but like he said it had been a difficult life. Yes, Jacob had a difficult and painful life. I am sure he had a few regrets. Think about it? Whose life does not have any regret?

Do you have regrets in your life? Many people do. So much so that the researchers at Cornell University did a study on what people regret most in their lives.

If you have any regrets, what do you regret the most? A lot of people regret the fact that they have not lived their true self. Many people have not discovered their passion, and if they have, they have not lived it. They just lived out their family’s and society’s expectations. Others regret that they have spent too much time working and not enough time with their family. They have not enjoyed their lives. They have not taken enough vacations and have not traveled much. Still others regret they have not kept in touch with their old friends. In old age, they were lonely and needed friends. People regret many things: the things they said or not said, the things they did or didn’t do.

Do you know what Cornell University Researchers discovered? After surveying university employees, students, retired professors, and nursing home residents, they discovered that twice as many people regretted the things that they did not do rather than things they had done. They regretted the things they had left undone or never even tried. Missed opportunities were the most common of all regrets. People regret that they did not take a chance when they had an opportunity.

At the end of your life, if you can confess that you have lived well, that is a great blessing. You know St. Paul had a hard and difficult life. But at the end of his life he said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

When Paul said he had kept the faith, he meant that he had endured in spite of all kinds of stress and discomfort, sufferings and trials. The life of faith does not exclude difficulties. It does not protect us from hardships. It does not guard us from regrets.

We may have things we regret. But do you know that God can take the broken pieces of our former lives and use them to build something beautiful?

Someone once wrote: “Not from humor but from love come the most beautiful smiles: from thanksgiving for daily bread; from the joy of sharing; from

the knowledge of sins forgiven; from the blessings of God.” Let the past be past. Enjoy the life you have now. For this is the gift of God.