

SPIRITUAL
GROWTH

for Senior Adults

Adult 7 Sunday School

Sunday, March 4

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INTRODUCTION

Things change as we get older. Hugh Prather once said, “Just when I think I have learned the way to live, life changes.” As we get older, some things don’t work as well while other things work better. For example, with age physical things get a little harder, but decisions become easier because of greater wisdom. We just need to learn how to adjust for each phase of life as we continue to change with age. This is also true regarding our spiritual life. Being a senior adult does not mean you can retire spiritually; there is a significant need for spiritual development and spiritual growth at every age, even for mature adults. We simply need to learn how to continue our spiritual journey towards a closer relationship with the Lord, even as other aspects of life change and may diminish. There is greater joy, contentment, and peace in each phase of life as we progress in our spiritual life. We only need to stay on course and continue to seek after the Lord!

OUTLINE

1. Demographics – the Silver Tsunami
2. It is a Natural Process to Grow Old
(Dust to Dust) *Ecclesiastes 3:1-2*
Genesis 3:19
3. Leaving a Legacy *Psalm 71:18-19*
Example – David to Solomon *1 Kings 2:1-3*
Our Influence Continues
through God’s Love *Psalm 103:14-18*
4. Older People have a Responsibility
to the Young *1 Peter 5:1-5*
5. Keep Growing Throughout Life *Ephesians 4:11-15*
6. The Process of Spiritual Growth
 - a. Belief
 - b. Worship
 - c. Bible Study
 - d. Prayer
 - e. Fellowship
7. Mature Adults Have Some Advantages
8. Winning the Race of Life *1 Cor. 9:24-27*
2 Timothy 4:6-8

1. DEMOGRAPHICS THE SILVER TSUNAMI

Population statistics and projections from the last two census data indicate that the fastest growing segment of the population will be older people, primarily above the age of 65.

This gives us an indication of what will happen in our Adult 5 (55-69) and Adult 7 (70 & up) church groups. The Adult 5 group is commonly known as the Baby Boomers, and are generally accustomed to progress and change. They were born in the period after World War II and up to the 1960s. The Adult 7 group is known as the Builders, and are generally more stable and conservative. They were born in the World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II period. The Adult 7 group of age 70 and above is projected to increase 40% in the next 10 years, or an increase of 70% in 20 years as the Baby Boomers age. The Adult 5 group is projected to increase a more modest 10-15% in the next 10 years and remain at that same level in 20 years as the larger group of Baby Boomers leave this age group. All of this means that there will be a very significant growth in the size of the senior adult segment of our population – the silver tsunami is coming! This means that there is also an even greater need to develop strategies for encouraging spiritual growth and development among mature adults.

2. GROWING OLDER

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die.” ECCLESIASTES 3:1-2

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” GENESIS 3:19

Growing older is a natural part of life, and therefore is not something to fear or become discouraged about. The absolute truth is that everyone is coming closer to the end of life as each day passes. And each of us is important enough to God to have an appointed time to be born and an appointed time for us to die. And during our short time here on earth, “there is a season” for each phase of our lives. Therefore, it is important to adjust to some things lost over time and other things gained over time for the different passages in a lifetime. From this point of view, growing older is simply a new phase of life, which requires a different emphasis and new goals, especially regarding spiritual maturity. While it is true that our physical body came from the dust of nothing and will eventually return from where it came, our spiritual existence will continue beyond physical death. For Christians, physical death leads to entering into the joy of eternal life with our Lord in heaven. For this reason, Christians can be encouraged to look forward in the later stages of life with joy, peace, and contentment, and at the same time continue to develop spiritually even as the physical body deteriorates with age. In this way, spiritual growth should remain a priority for senior adults.

3. LEAVING A LEGACY

*“So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.”* PSALM 71:18

Even in old age, there is a need to come closer to the Lord. In this passage, the Psalmist cries out “do not forsake me” as he desires a closer relationship with the Lord. There is also a reason and purpose behind this need for the Lord – to “proclaim your might to another generation.” Mature adults are more attuned to the brief time we are here on earth, and the need to have a relationship with the Lord before it is too late. That is why mature Christians think about passing on a legacy to the next generation. “All those to come” need to hear about the Lord, especially because young people often are not aware of their need for the Lord. The older generation needs to pass their wisdom along to those who are younger. In this way, leaving a legacy for the Lord brings a purpose to a passing generation.

EXAMPLE – DAVID TO SOLOMON

“When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, ‘I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in His ways and keeping His statutes, His commandments, His rules, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.’” 1 KINGS 2:1-3

In this passage, David passed on a legacy to Solomon, his son. David knew that his “time to die drew near” and therefore had a sense of urgency to tell Solomon about the important things in life. Sometimes Christians are seen by others as weak-minded people, but this is not true! David knew that following after

the Lord required strength and fortitude. That is why he told Solomon to “Be strong, and show yourself a man” and keep on “walking in His ways and keeping His statutes, His commandments, His rules, and His testimonies.” David had a sense of urgency to tell Solomon how to be a real man by placing the Lord at the highest priority in life and to seek after Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and body. This is a real legacy to pass on to the next generation.

OUR INFLUENCE CONTINUES TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

*“For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting
to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children’s children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.”*

PSALM 103:14-18

For those who have a relationship with the Lord, even though they have a brief life here on earth, their influence continues on through future generations because of the “steadfast love of the Lord.” Passing on a legacy about the love of the Lord continues “from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him.” It also serves as a reminder to “remember to do His commandments” as a means to culture righteous behavior. This legacy continues passing on “righteousness to children’s children,” to the grandchildren and beyond.

4. OLDER PEOPLE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE YOUNG

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

1 PETER 5:1-5

The Greek word here for “elder” is “presbyterios” and is often interpreted to apply to church leaders. However, this word can also mean simply an older person as well as a leader in the church (which would normally be an older, wiser person). For example, the parable of the prodigal son speaks of the “older” brother with the word “presbyterios.” Elsewhere in the bible, the word “episkopos” (which is translated as “bishop”) is used exclusively to refer to church leaders. This leads to the idea that this passage in 1 Peter applies more broadly to older people in general rather than exclusively to church leaders. With this new meaning, older people have a responsibility to “shepherd” the younger people in their family, just as a shepherd of sheep would take care of his flock. However, older people are to be “examples to the flock” and guide them not by issuing harsh commands but by exercising gentle “oversight, not under compulsion.” This new purpose in the life of an older person is responsive to the certainty that the “Chief Shepherd” will appear at some day in the future to give an “unfading crown of glory” to Christians and certain judgment to non-Christians.

5. KEEP GROWING THROUGHOUT LIFE

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

EPHESIANS 4:11-15

Paul gives advice to all Christians in this passage to continue the “work of the ministry” with the expressed purpose of “building up the body of Christ.” This is to continue for each Christian until they reach “mature manhood,” which is defined as reaching “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In other words, we should not stop growing until we are fully like Christ since Christ is perfect, this means we should never stop growing! Paul advises that we are to stay on course single-mindedly, not to be side-tracked by “every wind of doctrine.” This is where the wisdom of older people becomes more valuable; they have more experience in dealing with false “craftiness and deceitful schemes.” Christians are instead to continue to “grow up in every way into him, who is the head, into Christ.”

6. THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual growth begins when a person first becomes a Christian and then continues thereafter in a process known as sanctification. This growth process has several dimensions of action that progress all the way to the end of a Christian's life: belief, worship, bible study, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.

A. BELIEF

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

MATTHEW 4:17

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

JOHN 3:16

“Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”

ACTS 16:30-32

The process of spiritual growth begins when a person first becomes a believer, which is a new creature. Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” From birth we are identified with the old sin nature that Paul described in Galatians 5:19-21. But the new spiritual nature of a believer is identified with the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Becoming a new believer requires belief that includes repentance. Jesus first preached a gospel of repentance in Matthew 4:17 with a sense of urgency. To repent in this context means to turn away from sin towards God. Then in John 3:16, Jesus summarized the Good News of the Gospel with the words “whoever believes in Him.” Paul

also told the Philippian jailer that he would be saved if he would “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” The idea of the word “believe” is to have faith to trust in the Lord to save a person from the consequences of sin, along with the idea of His continuing leadership in the life of a believer. This means that becoming a Christian begins with an immediate change to a new creature, but also includes continuing spiritual development. It remains important for unsaved senior adults to come to know Christ as their Savior before it is too late!

B. WORSHIP

“Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and He is to be feared above all gods.”

1 CHRONICLES 16:23-25

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”

HEBREWS 12:28

Worship of the Lord is all about Him, and not about us! Worship becomes a means for senior adults to “be grateful” for all that the Lord has done for us based on a lifetime of experiences. That is why it is important to “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.” Older people have the luxury of knowing the Lord for a longer period of time, and have had the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with Him.

C. BIBLE STUDY

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

HEBREWS 4:12

“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”
PSALM 119:11

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”
PSALM 119:105

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

JOSHUA 1:8

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

ISAIAH 55:11

“But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

ROMANS 8:5b

Bible study is important for Christians of all ages, but especially for senior adults. The word of God is living and powerful, keeping us from sin and guiding us through life. Studying the bible will lead to good success in accomplishing the Lord’s “purpose” and master plan. For senior adults, maintaining contact with God’s word is what keeps us on the right path in life, and feeds the mind and soul with things of the Spirit.

D. PRAYER

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Prayer is one of the key strengths of senior adults. They very likely have seen and experienced answers to prayer, and therefore make prayer a serious part of their spiritual lives. We should be praying about everything in life, constantly being aware of the Lord and the many blessings He brings our way.

E. FELLOWSHIP

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREW 10:24-25

It is important for Christians to join together in “koinonia” fellowship, which means to “meet together” and “encourage one another” in a special bond based on a common relationship with the Lord. This is especially important for senior adults, who often feel “left out” in the later stages of life.

7. MATURE ADULTS HAVE SOME ADVANTAGES

While growing older has some disadvantages, there are also advantages as we age:

- **Older people are somewhat weaker, which can make them stronger in the Lord.**

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”
2 CORINTHIANS 11:30

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
JOSHUA 1:9

Older people are generally physically weaker than younger people. However, this weakness means that they must depend on the Lord more than others! Paul provided a personal testimony on being content in the midst of all kinds of difficulties in life. Spiritual success from weakness and hardships brings more glory to the Lord. Joshua also gave encouragement to an uncertain people who had wandered in a wilderness seemingly without purpose. Now they were to stand tall and “Be strong and courageous” for one very important reason... “the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” That same encouragement applies to senior adults who may feel weak or less capable. If the Lord is with you, anything becomes possible!

- **With age comes wisdom.**

“Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.”
JOB 12:12

The older we get, the more experience we acquire, which leads to wisdom. If you have already “been there and done that,” then you know how to handle it better. This is true as well for Christians with regard to spiritual maturity.

- **Older people can care more about other people.**

With age comes a better perspective on the important things in life, especially family, friends and relationships with others.

- **Older people understand the needs of the hurting.**

When you have experienced first-hand physical pain, suffering, and failures in life you can understand the needs of others more empathetically.

- **Older people are nearer to the end of their life and therefore closer to heaven.**

With age comes an appreciation for the after-life and spending eternity in heaven. This makes spiritual things more real to senior adults.

8. WINNING THE RACE OF LIFE

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Athletes understand the idea of finishing an event effectively, “leaving everything on the field.” For a runner in a race, near the end there is a final “kick” that keeps a runner at top speed just as he reaches the finish line. The same thing is true in the race of life, to finish “under control” but to finish with that last bit of effort in a way designed to win the race! Notice that a runner uses a different style of running at the end to win the race, just as an older person uses a different style of living to the end, with a single-minded determination of “receiving the prize” that has eternal value. Paul knew that older people should not believe that they are losing their life as they become older, but instead have an attitude of coming closer to receiving the grand prize of being in heaven with the Lord for an eternal life! Paul realized this need to finish the race of life in style as he came near the end of his life.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

This is what it means to win the race of life.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

1. Projections of census data indicate that there will be a huge increase in the number of senior adults in the next 20 years as the Baby Boomers age. This points to the need for new strategies to encourage senior adults to continue growing spiritually as this group becomes a dominant part of our society and can become a tremendous resource for the Lord’s work.
2. While it is true that our physical life diminishes somewhat with age, our spiritual life should increase as we grow closer to the end of life and pass into an eternity with the Lord in heaven. Senior adults need to continue growing spiritually even as they enter into more difficulties and hardships in their later life.
3. Senior adults have a responsibility to leave a legacy of righteousness to the following generations. Pray that the Lord will allow you enough time to leave a solid legacy.
4. All Christians should strive to be more like Christ as they progress through their spiritual life.
5. The process of spiritual growth includes belief, worship, bible study, prayer, and fellowship with other Christians.
6. There are advantages and disadvantages of growing older. In any event, we are to pursue life with an attitude of achieving spiritual success. Discipline and self-control in our spiritual life can help overcome any hardships and difficulties we may face, and lead to peace and contentment as we find purpose later in life and join together in accomplishing God’s master plan.



I M M A N U E L
B A P T I S T C H U R C H