

A woman with dark, curly hair is smiling broadly, wearing a blue denim shirt over a light-colored top. She is positioned on the right side of the frame. On the left, there is a white circular graphic containing text.

**GETTING
REAL**
about
GETTING OLDER

**FIVE BIBLE STUDIES TO HELP YOU
PREPARE FOR A GREAT LATER LIFE**



GETTING REAL *about* GETTING OLDER

A SATISFIED MIND

When we start to think of later life we usually do so with a degree of apprehension and negativity. We begin thinking about the impact of ageing on capacity, and we envisage our own worst case scenario. So we approach the thought of later life with some trepidation.

 *54% of UK 40-60s think that later life is a time to be afraid of*

The Bible views later life much more positively. This perspective is summed up in a simple promise God makes in Psalm 91:16, "With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

A satisfied mind and later life being put together goes strongly against the flow of popular opinion, and even the experience of some. Yet it is exactly what the Bible promotes as the reality of ageing. And in doing this it is not ignoring the effects of time and decay rather it is through those possibilities that satisfaction in the knowledge of Christ's presence with us and salvation is proved.

What then does it look like **IN REALITY?**

A promise from God to every Christian

This promise of satisfaction is made to those who are Christians. Psalm 91:14-15 says that this person, "holds fast to me [God] in love", that they pray, look to God in trouble and are someone to whom God is committed and will bless. That does not mean that the length of life is determined by a person's behaviour and faith as a sort of reward but that it is because this person has trusted their life to Jesus, and in faith seeks His mercy and help.

A life of satisfaction

There is an example of this in the Christmas story (Luke 2:22-38). Simeon and Anna were in later life and Simeon had been promised that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. When he encountered Joseph and Mary with Jesus, he immediately knew who the baby in Mary's arms was. He said, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation." He was satisfied and ready to die straight away. He had seen the Messiah.

A deepened experience of Salvation

Anna, on the other hand, looked at the baby Jesus, and despite her years she rushed off with a message to share with other people – she had a refreshed view of the hope she nurtured. This what Psalm 91:16 is saying – with long life can come an enhanced understanding of God's grace and mercy.

So in later years with whatever difficulties may come God is promising to those who trust in Christ that in a long life there will be satisfaction as the realities of salvation are enjoyed. That must make the thought of ageing rather more attractive than it is often presented in our society. **It is God's good pleasure to grant long life, satisfaction, and a precious experience of salvation.**

How do you feel about later life? What difference does God's promise about a long life make to your understanding of later life? What would a satisfied mind or deepened experience of salvation look like to you?

"With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalm 91:16



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LOOKING FORWARD

In the middle years of life we have a host of concerns that occupy our minds – family, job, home, friends, church, hobbies, and so on. Part of the challenge we face is keeping these in balance as when we do life can feel full and rewarding. In such circumstances thinking about later life can seem like an anti-climax. The reality is that in each phase of life there are benefits and problems.

 *43% of people are worried about being lonely but
60% are looking forward to rest and relaxation*

There is an interesting presentation of life in the Bible. Proverbs 4:18-23 describes life as a journey through a morning under the smiling observation of God. "The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day." Life starts in the chill of the early morning half-light as the sun rises. As we move through the short day of our lives the heat and brightness of the sun increases. By midday it is full out and we have reached our goal. There is the ancient blessing of living under the beams of God's face.

In this imagery later life is the brightest and warmest of times – it is when we can most appreciate God's smile. Here are some things we can think about to make the most of this precious time.

Structuring our days to achieve our goals

When paid employment comes to an end there is that opportunity to re-evaluate life and restructure activities. This is a broad area of consideration, but it is one of the stimulating aspects of later life. You are able to control your use of time and fit the days to your goals.

Preparing for those final years

But on this journey the possibilities of reduced capacities have to be considered. It is important to think of what may be ahead. "I knew I had to prepare for eternity, but no-one told me I had to prepare for being old." (John Stott, The Radical Disciple)

Contemplating and enjoying the thought of eternity

But those thoughts need not all be about the difficulties that may remain in this life, they can look forward, "Therefore we do not lose heart... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

How does that picture of life being like a morning resonate with you? How does looking forward to the brightness of God's light change how you think about later life? What can you start doing now to look forward to later life?

*"The path of the
righteous is like the
morning sun, shining
ever brighter till the full
light of day."
Proverbs 4:18*



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FINDING USEFULNESS

Boredom and inactivity are two of the things most dreaded by those thinking about later life. So often when someone ceases paid employment they are told, "You've done your bit now it's time to put your feet up". And while being able to enjoy more time for relaxation is very pleasant, actually having nothing of real value to do is most distasteful. That is also far from a Christian concept of later life.



21% of people are worried about being bored in later life

Think of King David. He was coming to the end of his life and had a great, unfulfilled ambition to complete the planning and arrangements for the building of the temple (1 Chronicles 23:1-2). To achieve this goal Solomon took over as King and David stepped down to concentrate on the details of the temple. It was his way of being useful in his later life.

Jesus taught that all those who follow Him would be fruitful (John 15:4-5), and Paul emphasised that same fact. The spheres of usefulness may well change as our capacities and opportunities change, and will certainly differ between individuals, but **it is God's intention that whatever our age we should be useful.**

What is amazing is how many of the great people in the Bible who achieved great things for God were in their later years. The reason is given in Psalm 92:12-15, 'The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him."'

These people are called 'righteous' because their sins have been forgiven and they are accepted by God. They are flourishing because their roots are in the good soil of God: they delight in His goodness and mercy to them. Out of their relationship with Him comes their fruitfulness and that is what the New Testament calls the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Holy Spirit lives in every believer and enables them to display the wonderful array of characteristics that are set out in these verses. Being related to God, they express themselves in a vast range of service (Galatians 6:2 and Titus 2:14). So we find that the idea of serving one another occurs over 100 times in the New Testament, and 'good works' are also frequently referred to, but never defined. In practice this means that older Christians are involved in an extraordinary range of activities in every country in the world.

With imagination, prayer, commitment and realism age will be no barrier to interesting activities that will enrich later life.

How do you see the connection between fruitfulness and usefulness? What does usefulness mean to you? How can you root yourself in the good soil of God now so that you will grow in fruitfulness and usefulness in later life?

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Galatians 5:22-23



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GROWING THROUGH CHANGES

Life is full of changes, and many of them cannot be avoided. Entering that time we call 'later life' is one transition we have to face. Whilst the changes cannot be avoided, we can make sure we are ready for them.

 *24% of people haven't done anything to prepare for later life*

One of the great changes in the Bible that led to improvement occurred when Jacob went down into Egypt at the time of a famine (Genesis 46-49). Jacob made preparations as far as his family and entourage were concerned, but God came to him to ensure spiritual advantage was taken. The improvements that took place were more than just location and obtaining regular supplies of food – Jacob was different in his behaviour. Whenever we encounter Jacob after the relocation he is blessing someone – Pharaoh (twice), his grandsons, and his twelve

sons, and in it all his wisdom, experience and relationship with God shines out. He grew through that dramatic change from Canaan to Egypt.

As in every part of life careful preparations can be made to ease us through the transitions and help us adapt to the changes. There are two passages in the Psalms that tell us about how to prepare ourselves emotionally and spiritually – Psalm 90:12 and Psalm 39:4. These verses promote numbering – or evaluating – our days. Paul had to relate to a change that was to some degree unwelcome but he learnt a phenomenal lesson about God's involvement in our lives, and that He supplies the strength needed (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). It is a blessing of being a Christian that God is with us in every experience and gives us strength and help.

Later life brings the opportunity to grow spiritually and in understanding. Growing in knowledge of Jesus Christ is a thrilling concept for every believer. This is not just intellectual and spiritual; it is also experiential and practical. There is a change that must take place when we exchange this present, transient, and decaying world for an eternal, unchanging and permanent world. A world of joy, love, and delight. When all that we look for in this world will be more than satisfied.

How do you feel about the idea of change? How have you known God give you strength and help through changes? How does thinking about God's faithfulness in change alter the way you think about later life?

**"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
2 Corinthians 12:9**



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CROSS-GENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Ours is a fragmented society and there are so many divisions around age that keep people apart rather than bringing them together. The tragedy is that every generation has something valuable to give, and each generation needs the wisdom and skill of the other generations to function to their best capacity. It is part of the God-given design for the local church.



Only just over a quarter of people (26%) are looking forward to spending more time with younger friends and family in later life

Working together

There is a dramatic picture of this in Proverbs 20:29, 'The glory of young men is their strength, grey hair the splendour of the old.' Wisdom and energy combined to produce the best result. This was understood by Moses when the children of Israel left Egypt (Exodus 17:8-13). Moses, the older man, and Joshua, the younger man, divided up responsibilities with Joshua leading the army and Moses (with two other octogenarians, Aaron and Hur) overseeing the battle, praying and seeking God's help.

Serving one another

This is the Bible's picture of cross-generational ministries. These biblical examples have no age group given superiority, although in most of the examples the older person provides guidance and wisdom, and in some cases leadership. There is a fascinating illustration of this juxtaposition of young and old given in Joel 2:28, "And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." Each age group participates in bringing God's words to His people. Their separate ministries combine in the whole process of communication.

Sharing God's grace

A further aspect of this intergenerational ministry is seen in the role of the old sharing their knowledge of God and His goodness with the rising generation. Something all people in later life can do. Psalm 71:18 is clear about this, 'Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.' A great example of this is Caleb and Othniel – Caleb calls on young men to fulfil a task to win his daughter in marriage which Othniel succeeds in. He clearly gains from this and goes on to be the first of the Judges – an old man's challenge produced a national leader (Judges 3:9-10).

Cross-generational ministries can have far reaching results. It is something to be explored as you enter later life.

In what ways do you feel the benefit of people who are older or younger than you? How could you start connecting with other age groups now? How does planning to connect with other generations in your later life change the way you think about that time?

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

Joel 2:28

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