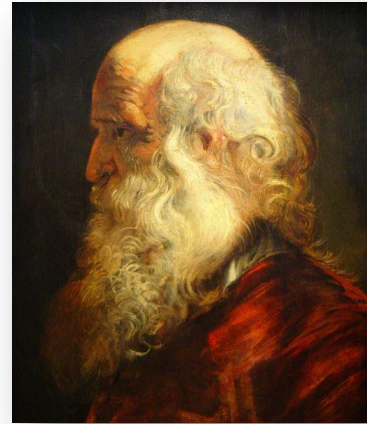


**Respecting the Older Generation**  
**Pastor John E. Dubler**  
**Psalm 90**

Western society views ageing as a plague, something we wish to avoid at all cost. We spend countless dollars on anti-ageing formulas, hoping against hope that we will not join the innumerable band of all humanity marching forward to their inevitable departure from this world. Eastern societies view age with great veneration, yet they make superstition out of it, fearing even retribution from ancestors if they do not worship or please them instead of the one true God.



Ruben's *Study of the Head of an Old Man*. C. 1610.

Meanwhile, the prevailing view of ageing in our country is a silly attempt at disdaining humor which reveals that our people, both young and old have not been taught the value of added years, nor respect for the aged. Even the aged themselves can have a lack of proper respect for their station in life and what it means, sometimes imagining themselves to be useless, derelict and discarded, left without hope in a world that focuses its attention on youth. Of course our culture reinforces both notions of youthful invincibility and desirability, and aged incompetence and meaninglessness.

I would like to address both the fear of ageing and its denigration. Is the so called “strength of youth” really what it claims to be? Is old age really the hopeless pit portrayed by everything and everyone from insipid birthday cards to humorists on TV? On deeper, scriptural reflection we will see that old age is to be desired—for with it comes wisdom. Old age is a blessing bestowed by God, an achievement to be both appreciated and honored. “It is a strange thing,” said Ben Franklin, “that while all would live long, none would be old.” Have Christians followed the world in this area and become unwitting accomplices of their secular world view? Let’s find out.

**A Biblical View of Ageing**



Papyrus fragment of Psalm 90

**Your days are numbered.** Psalm 90<sup>1</sup> instructs us to “number our days.” Whether we live many years or only a few days, our life walk, including all good days and bad, victories and missteps, romances and broken hearts, is an open book before God. **Psalm 139:16** tells us our days have been numbered from the very time we were formed in the womb:

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 90 is the oldest of the Psalms, having been written by Moses in about the 15<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Most of the Psalter was written in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., with a few of the verses written as late as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.

All of us will face death at some time. Psalm 89: 48 tells us, “What man can live and not see death.” Therefore Psalm 90:12<sup>2</sup> pleads, “So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.” When we have a proper understanding that our days are all allotted by God and numbered by Him, we too will begin to “number” them, counting each of them a vital opportunity to do God’s will in our lives while we live. Such a view of our days produces a healthy attitude both toward ourselves and others. When we realize that each day is numbered and a specific gift from God for which He has a divine purpose, we will neither exalt nor reproach either the young or the old, and we will properly view our own lives if we have the honor of living many days upon the earth.

**The Ancient of Days.** God Himself is pictured, both in Revelation 1:14 and Daniel 7:9 as an old but virulent being, powerfully dressed and crowned with hair white as wool. He is indeed, “The Ancient of Days.”

I kept looking  
Until thrones were set up,  
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;  
His vesture was like white snow  
And the hair of His head like pure wool.  
His throne was ablaze with flames,  
Its wheels were a burning fire.  
A river of fire was flowing  
And coming out from before Him;  
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,  
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;  
The court sat, and the books were opened.

**Daniel 7:9-10**

**Elderly examples.** Without going into the antediluvians, the oldest of whom lived some 969 years,<sup>3</sup> we have many who lived after the flood who serve as examples to us of graceful and indeed powerful ageing.

Caleb was 85 years old when he met with his fellow spy and now commander, Joshua, requesting that he be allotted his portion of land. He requested the hill country in and around Hebron, including the city of Hebron itself. Hebron was a stronghold of the Anakim giants, the city being previously known as Kiriath-Arba. Arba was one of the giants. Joshua 14:6-15 gives us the context of Caleb’s statement, “I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent



*Caleb* (Illustration from  
In Touch Ministries)

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are to the New American Standard Updated edition, published by the Lockman Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Methuselah lived 969 years and died in the year of the flood. It might be assumed, and not unreasonably so, that he perished in the floodwaters themselves, as his name is not given us to be among the survivors. Yet on this point we cannot be dogmatic.

me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in,” **Joshua 14:11**. Caleb’s physical strength was matched by spiritual strength. “Six times it is recorded of Caleb, ‘he hath fully followed the Lord,’” Henry Lockyer writes in his study of this amazingly faithful man. “What magnificent adverbs are used to describe Caleb. He followed faithfully, wholly, fully. He never lowered his standards, but was perpetually wholehearted.”<sup>4</sup> This is how we want to finish our course.



Simeon and Anna with the Child Jesus  
Arent de Gelder 1645 – 1727

bearing years thrown in for good measure. Certainly we should be conscious of God’s guiding hand in each of the days of our lives.

Simeon and Anna in their old age were sensitive servants of the Lord. These two servants of the Lord, both living when Jesus was presented by His parents at the Temple for dedication, were paragons of spiritual, but not necessarily physical strength. **Luke 2: 25-38** records the account. Simeon thanked God his eyes had seen the “Light of revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel,” (Luke 2: 32). Anna—a widow of 84 years of age—was in the temple fasting and praying when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus, only 8 days old, into the Temple. Anna also came up to them at the very time Simeon was delivering his remarkable prophecy and began praising God, realizing that her eyes had seen God’s salvation as well. What a remarkable juxtaposition of the very young with the very old, with those of child

**Wisdom is found among the aged.** The book of Job, chapter 12, verse 12 presents an unequivocal truth:

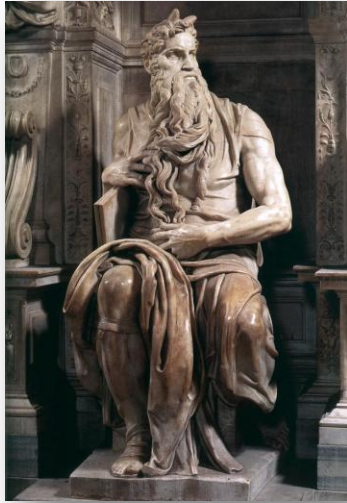
“Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding.”

This does not mean all aged are wise, any more than “the glory of young men is their strength,” (Proverbs 20:29), means that all young men are strong. But the message is incontrovertible. Wisdom does not reside with the callow and young. Wisdom is found among the aged and is a result of following the Lord for many years, hearing His voice, having the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others and to be chastened by one’s own.

**Lack of an aged man in one’s family a sign of extreme distress.** Consider the example of God’s judgment against the house of Eli, the priest. Because he did not correct his sons and became as spiritually lazy as he was corpulent, God sent a prophet to announce His just judgment against the house of Eli. The judgment included this: there would be no old man in Eli’s house forever.

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<sup>4</sup> From “The Faithful Follower,” published by In Touch Ministries.



Michelangelo's *Moses*

Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, “I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever;” but now the LORD declares, “Far be it from Me — for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.” Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. **1 Sam 2:30-32.**

**The Old Covenant preaches respect for the aged.** The Law of Moses declares: “You shall rise up before the gray headed and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD,” **Leviticus 19:32.** The fifth commandment instructs to “honor father and mother,” with a proximate consequence for obedience as, “That your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you,” Exodus 20:12.

The nation that does not honor God will see the aged leaders removed and that people will be given women and children to rule over them:<sup>5</sup>

**Isaiah 3:4-5**

And I will make mere lads their princes,  
And capricious children will rule over them,  
And the people will be oppressed,  
Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor;  
The youth will storm against the elder  
And the inferior against the honorable.

**Isaiah 3:12**

O My people! Their oppressors are children,  
And women rule over them.

Consider Jeremiah's lamentation over the desolation of Israel when he said:

**Lam 5:12-14**

Princes were hung by their hands;  
Elders were not respected.  
Young men worked at the grinding mill,  
And youths stumbled under loads of wood.  
Elders are gone from the gate,  
Young men from their music.

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<sup>5</sup> Women, including Deborah in the Old Testament and Margaret Thatcher of our own generation, have been remarkably gifted leaders. However Deborah made it clear that she should not be leading the nation in battle. Her intended role was that of judge.

Rehoboam made his fatal error when he spurned the counsel of the elderly and embraced the opinions of his peers. **1 Kings 12:8** “But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him.”



Ancient Redwood Grove

**A time is coming when almost all will live to see old age. Isaiah 65:20** relates Isaiah’s vision of the Millennial Kingdom, where ageing is respected and those living to old age are commonplace. In that day, someone who is 100 years old will be counted among the young people.

No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,  
Or an old man who does not live out his days;  
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred  
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred  
Will be thought accursed.

**A promise for the elderly from Isaiah 46:4:**

Even to your old age I will be the same,  
And even to your graying years I will bear you!  
I have done it, and I will carry you;  
And I will bear you and I will deliver you.

**Bearing fruit in old age also a promise for the righteous.** The Lord knows that old age will bring with it challenges, especially physical ones. Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 present a vivid picture of the physical consequences of ageing in our fallen world. But not to despair, God has not left us defenseless even in the face of increased aches and pains. **Psalms 92: 12-15** relates a remarkable promise for the elderly: They will still be yielding fruit in old age—they need not be consigned to a life of mindless inactivity.

The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree,  
He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.  
Planted in the house of the LORD,  
They will flourish in the courts of our God.  
They will still yield fruit in old age;  
They shall be full of sap and very green,  
To declare that the LORD is upright;  
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

*Ignorance* views old age as a curse but the righteous count the time of elder years as a blessing. An old Jewish proverb sums it up well:

For the ignorant, old age is as winter;  
For the learned, it is a harvest.

**The gray head (the elderly) is counted as a time of glory and honor:**

**Proverbs 20: 29**

The glory of young men is their strength,  
And the honor of old men is their gray hair.

**Proverbs 16:31**

A gray head is a crown of glory;  
It is found in the way of righteousness.

**Now is the time to prepare for old age.**

There is some sage advice to the young in Ecclesiastes 12:4 “Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them.’” If you do not follow the Lord as a young person, don’t expect that somehow in your latter years you will be totally happy. The law of sowing and reaping applies. Galatians 6:7-8: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”



My father, Roger B. Dubler as a young man

**The New Covenant teaches respect for the aged:**

Specifically, respect for parents is delivered as of great importance. Ephesians 6:1-2 and Colossians 3:20 recap the importance of children being obedient to parents. Those who are disobedient to parents are counted as degenerate. Romans 1: 30 lists disobedience to parents as part of the “depraved mind,” and 2 Timothy 3 lists such disobedience and disrespect along with all kinds of evil including brutality and treachery.

**2 Timothy 3:2-5** “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.”

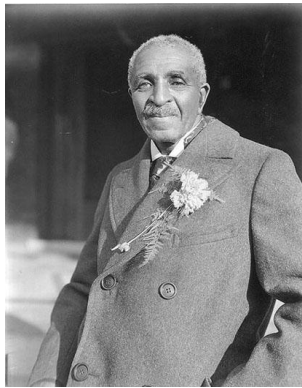
**We live in a society that is prone to the neglect of aged people.**

How often we hear of old people who die unnoticed and alone, not discovered for weeks in their solitary rooms. We can change at least a small part of that horrendous level of neglect by having a heart for the elderly, and seeking ways to bless and encourage them. If a child were to die alone and neglected there would be a huge outcry. But with the elderly it is passed off only as a sad reality. But how can this be if we truly understand the value God places on the aged? After

all, the elderly are still children of the King, they are just older than other children. Let us all have a heart for the elderly and find ways to bless them.

We can teach respect for the aged to our young people by encouraging interaction with older generations in our churches and neighborhoods. Opportunities for ministry both in homes and retirement communities abound.

**Old age has more glories than youth can ever know.** Even with the advantage of good vision, perfect hearing, elastic tendons and resilient muscles, “youth,” as my father would say, “is wasted on the young.”



George Washington Carver  
1860-1943

With age comes wisdom. With wisdom comes the harvest of a well ripened and accomplished life. The wise of heart among the elderly will celebrate the glorious harvest of the fulfillment of this life’s work. The wise among those younger will respect the aged.

**A conclusion from George Washington Carver.**

“How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday you will have been all of these.”