

## The Trials of Age

### *Prayer*

This week I started thinking about getting older. I am 53 today but I was thinking: What about all the ages and stages of my life? With Christmas just around the corner, I started to consider the four ages of my life with relation to Santa Claus. Don't judge me...

1. When was a child – I believed in Santa Claus
2. When I was older – I didn't believe in Santa Claus
3. When I an adult – I was Santa Claus
4. When I hit 50 – I started to look like Santa Claus

Can any of you Guys relate?

Now this might be truth, but it doesn't matter how old we are or at what stage of life, Jesus loves us and can use us for his glory. In a previous sermon, I mentioned how Jesus was found teaching at the synagogue when his mother was looking for him. I also mentioned how Moses was 80 when he went to see Pharaoh and told him to let the Israelites go.

Oddly enough, my thoughts lead me to remember a story about the legendary baseball player Babe Ruth. Babe Ruth had hit 714 home runs during his baseball career and was playing one of his last full major league games. It was the Braves versus the Reds in Cincinnati. But the great Ruth was no longer as agile as he had once been. He fumbled the ball and threw badly, and in one inning alone his errors were responsible for most of the five runs scored by Cincinnati. As the Babe walked off the field after the third out and headed toward the dugout, a crescendo of yelling and booing reached his ears. Just then a boy jumped over the railing onto the playing field. With tears streaming down his face, he threw his arms around the legs of his hero. Ruth didn't hesitate for one second. He picked up the boy, hugged him, and set him down on his feet, patting his head gently. The noise from the stands came to an abrupt halt. Suddenly there was no more booing. In fact, hush fell over the entire park. In those brief moments, the fans saw two heroes: Ruth, who in spite of his dismal day on the field could still care about a little boy; and the small lad, who cared about the feelings of another human being. Both had melted the hearts of the crowd. <sup>(1)</sup>

It doesn't matter how old, how young, how skilled or unskilled we as people are we can still make a difference in peoples lives.

Maybe some other examples will help...

1. Ted W. Engstrom, The Pursuit of Excellence, 1982, Zondervan Corporation, pp. 66-67.  
2. United Technologies Corporation, in Charles Swindoll, Living Above the Level of Mediocrity, p.104.  
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Ted Williams, at age 42, slammed a home run in his last official time at bat.  
Mickey Mantle, age 20, hit 23 home runs his first full year in the major leagues.

Golda Meir was 71 when she became Prime Minister of Israel.  
William Pitt II was 24 when he became Prime minister of Great Britain.

George Bernard Shaw was 94 when one of his plays was first produced.  
Mozart was just seven when his first composition was published.

Now how about this? Benjamin Franklin was a newspaper columnist at 16  
and a framer of the United States Constitution when he was 81.

You're never too young or too old if you've got talent.  
Let's recognize that age has little to do with ability. <sup>(2)</sup>

One of my friends, and don't look so surprised... I have them, said: "Ray, I see your birthday is September 30<sup>th</sup>. That's cool. May I ask what year?" so I told them the truth... I said: "Every year."

Is it true that we are only as old as we feel? Did you know that after thirty I started thinking that I was getting old? Looking back I find it interesting that when I started to think that way, I started to feel that way and so got somewhat depressed. It's almost like my perspective became a reality for me.

Many people as they see themselves aging start to feel tired. Some feel that they can't take anymore. They become exhausted by life. Seriously 30? What a joke. But we can feel old, tired and worn out at any age. This morning I want to share with you what turned me around on this. I may still kid about it, but I am no longer old. You see; I came to a revelation...

Today, I am not 53 out of 70 possible years or 53 out of 100 years. I am 53 out of eternity. That is really pretty young isn't it? This morning, how do you view yourself?

I have a pastor friend who changed denominations because he was told that he was too old at 58. He was told he was no longer relevant. I find that perspective sad. Psalms 92:13-14 says:

*Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;*

Folks so many of us have had hard situations in our lives. That is a reality, but what makes a difference is whether or not we view what we learned in these situations as wisdom we can pass on, or hurt that we accumulate over a lifetime.

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Age is a matter of perspective. Recently, I was concerned that I could lose my mother from heart surgery. This was a reality check, one might even say a wake up call about my own mortality. So I was a bit down and decided to do what I normally do when things get too difficult to stand. I got on my knees and was reminded of two very important concepts that I seemed to have forgotten.

- I no longer need to fear death because it is a graduation to heaven and Jesus and I know he has me in the palm of his hand.
- My mother is saved and if she had passed, I would grieve and miss her, but I needed to shake myself that even death is not the end. I would see her again. Thankfully praise Jesus she is still here and still glorifying God.

Here is the wisdom that I walked away with. If we truly believe in God and his promises, then death is not something to be feared any longer. What it becomes is a companion that journeys with us through this life reminding us to cherish every moment.

What of birth? Are we not excited to welcome a new life into the world? It is truly the miracle of a new thinking breathing individual person? It is profound. Do we each of us not see those exciting life events as sources of joy and happiness? After all it is a new life?

Who has had a kid? Am I right? It is an exciting time isn't it?

How long did it take you to start worrying about the child getting hurt or skinning their knee? How long before you started to worry about other things? How long until you were thinking about the right boy or girl for your child? How did you feel when they started to drive?

We do these things and yet we are told in Philippians 4:6-7 to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication (asking earnestly), with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

As parents we are always careful and diligent with our children, but we do not have to engage in worry or be anxious. Scripture tells us to be anxious for NOTHING. That means we should not worry. This sounds impossible doesn't it?

Well... it isn't but there are some requirements for us to let things go in the worry department. They are prayer, which includes praising God, but it also includes asking God. How this works we don't need to understand, we just need to believe that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds.

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This life has many cares and burdens, but we are told to cast our cares on him because he cares for us. This means to tell him our problems and thank him for their resolution in faith. He tells us his burden is easy his yolk is light. He can handle it. He IS God.

Even when we experience loss we need to have faith and trust God.

I have lost people I cared about and I have grief. I really struggled with the loss of 9 children before Rayya was born and yet for those who are saved, I choose to focus on the fact that they are not lost forever, but only for the moment. Is grieving okay, is it Godly. Absolutely, but we also need to have faith in God that we will see our loved ones again.

I was saying this life carries many burdens...

For the baby, their primary concerns are:

- Where is my food?
- Who is going to change my diaper?
- Where is mom or dad?

When you think of these vital concerns today do you worry? Most of us would not because we know that those needs are going to be met. The baby might worry about their next meal but for most of us, mom is there ready to give love and food. Dad may change our diapers. In the overall scheme of things the child learns to trust that mom and dad will be there.

For most toddlers, their primary concerns are:

- Where is my food?
- Where is my bike?
- Where are my toys?

Now the first one is easy because they know that mom or dad will give them food. This is something they have LEARNED and have come to TRUST. As an adult here today, given the worries you may be experiencing how does the location of your Tinker toys or your remote control car add up against the cares you have today? They were vital concerns when you were little, what changed?

For the child, their primary concerns are:

- School & School work
- Having what the other kids have
- Seeking approval for what they can do

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We can all agree, I think on the fact that schoolwork is important, but if the child is encouraged and tries they are a success regardless of their marks. Some parents are not involved with the child's learning or are too involved both of which have consequences. Now we see the first significant issue starting to arise from an adult perspective. Does the parent respond and encourage or react in fear to any deficit in achievement? Has the parent stifled the little persons childhood or pushed them into anxiety?

There were heavy expectations on me as a child. My parents moved about every 6 months to a new place and I had to reinsert myself into the new school dynamic constantly. If I got 90% on an exam, I would be asked what happened to the other 10% and so on. You have a 172 IQ can't you do better and so on. I became discouraged, and in retrospect depressed. Until I discovered that Einstein got c+ marks in school. I grew as I came to realize that I was thinking outside of the paradigm of the teachers I was under. But I learned to play the game. At the time I was struggling I felt these stresses were insurmountable. I look back on this today and laugh because of the insignificance in the big picture of what I was worried about.

At each stage in our growth, we are dealing with ever more complex and difficult issues. Consider the adult that has a daughter whom is living with an abusive boyfriend. Consider the Grand Parent who is concerned about the salvation of her family members? It just seems like things get harder and harder. Consider the senior that is worried about how their family will make do once they are gone.

I can only imagine when I am standing in heaven how insignificant the problems that we are facing as adults would seem. When there is no death or dying, when we are with Jesus and all the troubles of this world are passed away, how will I perceive the trials of this world?

What I am getting at this morning is simple.

Our perspective and our level of growth dictate how we respond to and deal with the circumstances that life tosses at us.

Would you be upset to be in chains and in prison this morning?

The apostle Paul had reached maturity in the faith. With all this in context, please turn with me to Philippians 4:11 ESV:

*Not that I am speaking of being in need for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.*

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How is Paul content with this? He is content because he does not have fear in his circumstance; he looks at it from a mature perspective and realizes that God has him covered.

In James 1:4 NLT the scripture tells us in regards to this faith:

*So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete needing nothing*

So... regardless of your age, your problems, your circumstance, bring your thoughts captive to the mind of Christ because there is a purpose. The apostle James tells us in James 1:2-4 ESV:

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

When we struggle are we praying and asking God for what we need with thanksgiving?

James also tells us what action to take if we are struggling...

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*

We need to pray and ask God and believe that he will deliver and thank him for it knowing he will always provide that which is needed. We are told in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Finally, what if you are simply overwhelmed and have no more faith to go on?

In 1 Corinthians 12 we are told about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is faith. If you need more, ask.

This morning I submit to you that true happiness starts with faith in Jesus Christ regardless of age. It is linked with a deep and peaceful inner harmony. For this to be the case this clearly implies an acceptance of one's age. It can involve the acceptance of no longer being a child when one becomes an adult. It could be the giving up of heavy labor or active physical goals when one becomes advanced in years. Regardless we need to be content. I remember a memory shared by evangelist George Whitefield.

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George was relating the difficulties of the gospel ministry to some friends. He said that he was weary of the burdens and was glad that his work would soon be over and that he would depart this earthly scene to be with Christ. The others admitted having similar feelings -- all except one, a Mr. Tennant. Noting this, Whitefield tapped him on the knee and said, "Well, Brother Tennant, you are the oldest among us; do you not rejoice to think that your time is so near at hand when you will be called Home?"

The old man answered bluntly that he had no wish about it. When pressed for something more definite, he added, "I have nothing to do with death. My business is to live as long as I can, and as well as I can, and serve my Savior as faithfully as I can, until He thinks it's time to call me Home." Whitefield accepted that word as a gentle rebuke from the Lord, and it helped him go on with his work calmly and patiently.

Whatever your age is or your stage of growth, God wants you to live an abundant life. He has plans for you and he can use a 5 year old just as easily as he can use someone who has reached 96. The requirement is simply a desire to be fruitful and faith-FULL and look at things from a Godly perspective.

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