

LIVING AS A SENIOR ... AND LOVING IT!

The Potential of the Latter Years

by Dr. Ed Watke

Revival In the Home Ministries, Inc.

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Introduction

When is a person old? Bernard Baruch was asked when he was in his eighties when old age takes place. He replied, "*Old age is fifteen years older than I am.*" Is old age a disease such as arthritis, or is it like infancy -- a normal stage in human life? Is old age a state of body or mind?

Aging is not the same thing as being old. It is a process that begins at birth. Being old is largely a state of mind and not just of the body. Aging is a slow, biological change that overtakes us all. While we may be in a state of growing older, we are not necessarily old. There are some twenty-five year olds who are old, and at the same time there are many elderly who are very youthful in spirit. There are also many in mid-life who are chronologically young but very old in mind and spirit. A one hundred-year-old lady was asked what she had made of her life. She responded, "Can't tell yet, I'm still making my life.

The Jews had their own standards of measurement for the aging process. They viewed it as coming in three stages. From sixty to seventy they regarded as the commencement of old age, from seventy to eighty as hoary-headed old age, and from eighty on as advanced old age or "*well stricken in years.*" Too often we consider ourselves old when we are but sixty or sixty-five.

Cultural viewpoints.

In the Oriental culture age is equated with wisdom. In countries like Japan the elderly have a respected status and enjoy high prestige. Our culture has a near worship of youth. We have put the emphasis of our lives upon achievement and productivity, and the quality of life is regarded as of secondary importance.

There is a lot of truth in the adage that one is just as old as he feels. Morton Puner maintains that "*most people over seventy are secretly young and disguised in an older skin.*" The aging and the old do not think of themselves as old necessarily. Underneath that aging skin and body, they may feel as young as ever in mind, vision, and desire.

Many of the problems for the aging is of their making as they become negative about life and bring about self-inflicted depression. Technically, old age is not something from which one dies. The cause of death is disease or organic deterioration as a result of the body's failing to replace vital cells. This inevitable process is no surprise to God.

Myths about old age.

Around the mysterious experiences of growing older there flutters a flock of myths that need to be frightened away. It is a proven fact that if a statement is repeated often enough by a considerable number of people, it comes to be accepted ultimately as truth, even though it cannot be sustained.

Some myths about old age or about growing older ought to be exposed and discarded for what they are . . . just a myth. A myth is a traditional story evolved or created out of some idea, having no existence in fact. These cloud many a life and are a trouble to many who would enjoy growing old with God.

It is a myth that:

1. The closing years of life will inevitably be less enjoyable and stimulating than the earlier years.

2. Old age is a disease and is synonymous with disability and ill health.
3. Growing older is inevitably a time of decline and further growth and development are not to be expected.
4. Old people are always less robust physically and mentally in their later years.
5. Old age is a time of unmitigated misery, and it is normal for older people to be unhappy.
6. New relationships are difficult or even impossible to form and maintain in old age.
7. Most homes of the elderly are gloomy and have a prison-like atmosphere.
8. Uninhibited joy and enjoyment cannot be expected in old age.

People grow older three ways: *chronologically, physiologically, and psychologically.*

Within these three different aging factors there may be great disparity, and the same person can be at three different ages. Therefore, it is unwise to think of aging in the terms of a clock or a calendar, for many who are chronologically old are very young in the other two factors. Often it is opting out of activity and involvement and relinquishing the struggle for further growth and development that brings about old age. It is a proven fact that many die shortly after retirement as they plan to "*sit and do nothing.*"

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THE POTENTIALS OF THE LATTER YEARS

By Dr. Ed Watke

Lesson One

"Attitudes--Not Arteries--May Be the Problem"

INTRODUCTION:

Most of us go through life unaware of the fact that our bodies are slowly aging until we feel a sudden twinge, ache, or pain. Inwardly, we still visualize ourselves as eternally eighteen or twenty-one or maybe thirty-five. We usually imagine youth in terms of health, agility, flexibility, spontaneity, creativity, and a host of other wonderful things, and feel that such are all gone out of our lives.

Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was perfect, and he was as strong as a younger man. Caleb, along with Joshua, did great and mighty things when elderly and did not allow age to militate against a walk of service and fruitfulness.

To many people the age of 65 means that we are "used up," and 75 means that we have one foot in the grave. Age is a relative term. Baseball players are considered old at 35, and a basketball guard is old at 30.

Of some we could write . . . Died at forty, Buried at seventy, Died of hardening of viewpoints and disinterest in life! Attitudes toward old age vary greatly because people are so diverse in temperament and outlook. Some face the prospect of growing old in a negative manner. Others face it with a positive outlook, and the music of their soul strikes the keys of the major chords. The negative make very mournful music. Some become very occupied with themselves, their problems, their aches and pains, and their sorrows, and they literally make life miserable for all who are around them.

I. THE ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE (Romans 12:2)

Cheerful souls embrace the strengthening truth that the "will of God" includes the aging process and it is the "good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." They take these words literally, and make it apply to their case. It is only logical that since God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect, then complaining about it or rebelling against it is out. If God's will is acceptable, it must be accepted. Since it is perfect, it cannot be improved upon. The joy of accepting God's will can be ours and also can be proven in daily life. We all know that older age or growing older is as inevitable as the succession of summer and winter, so it is wise for us to face the prospect with realism and with optimism (Psalm 90: 1, 2, 1217; 103).

We must have the right kind of "mind set" about aging. As each season of the year has its own peculiar beauty and purpose, so each age has its own attractiveness, yet we "do all fade as a leaf," and life is but a "vapor."

God wants to build into our lives the beauty of the fall and the beauty of the winter of our lives. While winter brings rigors and difficulty, there is the beauty of God's hand upon the snow. The beauty of God upon the person is what makes them lovely in the midst of aging years.

II. THE ATTITUDES OF LEARNED CONTENTMENT

For some old age is pleasant and enjoyable, but for others it is painful and depressing. Some anticipate it with eagerness and yet others with fear and foreboding. Some accept it, others rebel against it. Some

find it exhilarating, others are bored. *"I am not as old as my arteries,"* said one old man, *"I am only as old as my attitudes."*

While there are progressive changes both in mind and body as we age, how we respond is totally a personal choice. Paul wrote, *"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (John 15:11; Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5, 6). He did not say that he was always content, but that he learned to be content. For him, as well as for us, such an education may be a painful school. The point is that he graduated with flying colors.

III. THE ATTITUDE OF PREPARATION: Preparing to Meet God (Psalm 119; Titus 2:1, 2, 8)

Our entire life is but a preparatory school for our older age or for the aging years. What we do, believe, and our outlook of the early years will condition us and prepare us for the latter years. Acceptance through our life makes a big difference.

We can make preparation by walking with God as Enoch of old. Enoch walked with God! This walk prepared him for the inevitable time of meeting God.

By being a student of the Word of God, God can lead us in a wonderful way, and the latter years can be years of growth and fruitfulness. Psalm 119 could be a "watch-word" of our lives as we meditate upon the sure Word of God, bringing maturity, depth, wisdom, and divine blessing.

There is an untapped POTENTIAL in the accumulated knowledge, experience, and faith of older Christians. We could all enrich the work of God by our attitude and desire to be a vessel that God can use.

There are those who have done great exploits in their elderly years. Many are the people who have done great things in their aging years.

Christ likened the Christian life to a river that is overflowing, fruitful, and abounding unto blessing for others (John 7:37-39). This is not just for the young or the lively, for the closing years of life could be the most fruitful if we wanted them to be and if we were willing to be used of God.

The closing years could be stimulating, joyful, and fruitful if we would give ourselves to God totally and unreservedly. Such people refuse to be defeated by father time. They resolve to master old age, not to be defeated by it. They are grateful, thoughtful, and cheerful in adversity and see opportunities to prepare to serve the Lord.

On one occasion Sylvester Horne, a brilliant preacher of the last generation, preached a sermon to a congregation of elderly people. He was himself in that category. When someone inquired what his text was, he invited them to make a guess. *"At eventide it shall be light,"* suggested one. *"Come unto me, all ye that are weary, and I will give you rest,"* said another.

But the answer was "no" to both of these. What was his text? *"And about the eleventh hour He went out . . . and saith to them . . . Go ye also into the vineyard"* (Matthew 20:6, 7). It is not too late to "go into the vineyard of the world" and to serve the Lord in the eleventh hour! There are many ways in which we can go. We should be willing to go at the eleventh hour of our lives as well as when we are young. We need to serve the Lord and to prepare for the time we will meet Him.

Also, we prepare for a fulfilling life here and now by dedicated, willing service. Our attitudes will have the greatest effect upon our service, far more than our age or aging condition (Romans 14:17; 15:13, 14). May we have the grace to look intently at our attitudes and be far more concerned about them than about our physical condition or circumstances of life.

"Growing Older Has Its Compensations!"

INTRODUCTION:

Old age is not always associated with joy and enjoyment. It is often viewed as an unfortunate and unhappy period of life that we all wish we could avoid and wonder why in the world God planned for such. But these attitudes are not biblical, nor are they shared by all. They do not bring good results in the lives of those who hold on to constant negativeness.

God planned for the older years to be a "golden opportunity~ to build in much spiritual growth and deep happiness. Solomon contended that a "hoary [gray] head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31). Enjoyment of life, even in old age, can be quite independent of present circumstances. That is difficult for many of us to accept. We think that happiness is always based on "happenings." If the events are not good, then joy in the Lord cannot be experienced.

An enjoyable and fruitful old age is not automatic. It must be prepared for and worked at. Most of us give little thought to this in our early years. Days are often full with the present pressing upon us, and the future is not reflected upon.

Many find that they have not adequately prepared in their heart and mind for the latter years. Many have not mastered the art of using leisure time in an enjoyable, yet rewarding and fruitful manner. We should, therefore, encourage younger people not to repeat our mistake.

I. SENIORS HAVE TIME TO ENTER INTO JOY INEXPRESSIBLE AND FULL OF GLORY (Luke 6:22, 23; John 15:11; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:4; I Peter 1:8).

There are some aging Christians who radiate joy and whose very presence is a benediction. They are like Barnabas--the son of encouragement (Acts 4:36). It is said that when John Wesley was an old man, his very presence was a radiance of his personality as the Holy Spirit radiated a portion of his own felicity. In him old age appeared delightful--like an evening without a cloud. And it was impossible to observe him without wishing, "May my latter end be like his!"

We are urged to rejoice!

We can take the time to worship, to meditate, and to saturate our lives with the Lord and manifest the joy of the Lord.

Paul was rejoicing while in prison in his old age. He urged the saved to rejoice (Philippians 4:4; I Thessalonians 5:16). What a contrast compared to griping, complaining, criticizing, and grumbling that easily can become the practice of the elderly. The joy he spoke of did not spring from the buoyancy of youth or from the absence of trouble, for joy and sorrow can, and often do coexist. Paul spoke of being "*sorrowful and yet always rejoicing.*" (II Corinthians 6:10). And James exhorts us to "*count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*" (James 1:2).

The divinely bestowed joy is not just carefree merriment but is joy in the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is the Holy Spirit who imparts to us the very joy of Christ. "*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*" (Romans 14:17).

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:13).

Rejoicing brings blessing.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). *"Life's evening will take its character from the day which has preceded it. Thou shalt always have joy in the evening if thou hast spent the day of life well."* So wrote George Matheson in his book "Gathered Gems."

The joy of achieving, the joy of service, the joy of serving others, and the joy of a blessed walk with the Lord is open to the aging. There can be great joy in unhurried prayer, time in the Word of God, and a quiet, holy, worshipful walk with God. With less pressure on his time, the older person can discover to a degree never before possible the joy of Bible study and can develop a systematic prayer life that would make the whole world his parish. Now there is time to enjoy in leisure the wonder of a blessed love-walk with the Lord.

We will get much more positive enjoyment out of the present if we refuse to spoil it by murmuring about the disappointments of the past or harboring unwarranted fears for the future.

II. SENIORS HAVE THE TIME TO ENTER INTO A LIFE OF INTERCESSION (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:18; I Timothy 2:8; James 5:16).

There are advantages as well as disadvantages in the eventide of life. There are positives and negatives that are experienced in every age and stage of life. Each stage of life has its own peculiar testings, but brings also its own rewards. Old age is no exception to that rule. In senior years it is usually the disadvantages that are given prominence, while the advantages (or positives) are largely ignored.

Childhood is relatively carefree and happy, but even childhood knows its fears and crushing disappointments. Youth thrills to new excitements, but youth are also often confused and haunted by the fear of the future and the confusion of present changes taking place in their being. Middle age knows the joy of achievement, but also the burden of ever-widening responsibilities.

Older age with all its acknowledged handicaps and limitations can, however, open up new horizons of joyous possibility to all of us. *"When I am weak, then am I strong"* (II Corinthians 2:10).

Praying and seeking God.

Jacob became Israel as he prevailed in prayer. He now had power with God and with man because he prevailed in seeking for the blessing of God upon his life as he met God at Jabok (Genesis 32:22-32).

In the conflicts between Joshua and the Amalekites, we have the story of three aging men (all octogenarians) who have prevailed in prayer for Joshua and his army battling in the valley (Exodus 17:8-16). If it had not been for Moses, Aaron, and Hur on the mountaintop, the battle would have been lost. It proved to be the weaponless hands of prayer on the mountain rather than the clash of arms in the valley that controlled the tides of battle and made the difference. Old as they were, these three were God's hidden instruments in the battle for victory. So we can make the difference in the battles for victory in the work of God today.

III. SENIORS HAVE UNHURRIED TIME TO WITNESS TO THE LOST (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:36).

One old lady became a "missionary in sheets" as she could not get out of bed, but with paper and pen she saw a goodly number come to Christ through her loving words and tracts which she prepared and

were mailed for her. One gentlemen, about whom I was told, went into an eastern city each day and stood at a certain place giving out great numbers of tracts in his latter years. He knew of a number who began their journey toward salvation through the conviction brought into their lives because of his labors.

In Omaha many years ago, my wife and I went weekly to minister at one of the city jails. There we met an old gentleman who carried on a vital ministry to those who were so "*undone*." By his life and compassion many came to Christ. Great was the influence of his life in those latter years.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. God gives us a ministry of intercession and the exercise of spiritual authority.
2. Faith grows only as it is tested, and old age is one of the crucibles in which the testing takes place.
3. It is through the dark experiences of life rather than in the lightsome joys that our faith rises to new heights.
4. The joy of the Lord can be a power in our lives and the source of spiritual vitality as we learn to walk in a life of rejoicing.
5. The joy of fruitful, rewarding service can be the portion of the elderly as never before. Spiritual vision and desire are great prerequisites.

“Keep on Keeping on -- in These Important Things!”

INTRODUCTION:

A famous preacher spoke of a friend who at seventy-five never seemed to get old. He was always full of young ideas and had a youthful approach to life. He was always getting ready for tomorrow and looked forward with excitement to the day after tomorrow. When asked about his attitude on aging, this same friend said, *"All the sugar is at the bottom of the cup!"*

A pastor by the name of Harris Gregg was in his mid-seventies and still pastoring in his retirement years. The young people of the church visited the parsonage regularly, for he seemed so young in his outlook. His alert mind and busy schedule belied his years. He gave guidance to those who visited him and encouraged them to do the following things.

Keep reading widely -- Keep interested in people and things -- Keep thinking constructively -- Keep studying the Word of God

A recent study in Kansas City surveying the reaction of the elderly brought out these facts. The study gave much evidence that even very old people needed to be connected with others. Those between 70 and 74 apparently still had a degree of daily interactions with others. Nearly 20 percent of them were very active in many ways and in a number of organizations.

I. KEEP LOVING (I Corinthians 13:1-13).

"The path of love is not always smooth," goes an ancient saying. Whether it be love for spouse, family, friends, or country, the love between two persons involves deep exchanges, and the results will be deep mutuality. Biblical love brings the sharing, understanding, and encouragement that actually changes involved people. Love is not some exterior accompaniment of life; it is the very stuff out of which life is fashioned.

Twelve times *"God commands us to love one another."* This love ought to be manifested especially in marriage and home relationships (John 13: 34, 35; 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; I Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; I Peter 1:22, 23; I John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 8, 11, 12; II John 1:5).

Keep loving your spouse.

There is a great joy and a great mystery about the union between two persons in marriage. If this union is strong, each of the partners has learned through the years to be more and more supportive and caring and are more and more intrigued by the other. This so often is not the case! (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 29, 31; Titus 2:4).

Anne Philippe expresses this marriage love beautifully in her book: *No Longer Than a Sigh. "I look at you asleep and the world you are in, the little smile in the corner of your lips, the flicker of your eyelids, your relaxed body, all those mysteries. We talk: your voice, your thoughts, the words you use are the most familiar in the world. We can even finish the sentence begun by the other. And yet you are, and we are a mystery."*

Paul speaks of that mystery of "oneness" that should be our portion in marriage and is to be the outward illustration of the "oneness" we have in Christ (Ephesians 5:30-32). There ought to be a wonderful bonding of the two into one.

Married love consists not only of physical attraction but of shared interests, games, vocations, and pastimes. The interests themselves can be absorbing. But beyond that the give and take enriches the molding process between persons.

Keep loving your family.

There must be growth in the ability of giving and receiving love. We must strive to maintain close ties with our extended family as our children marry and have children of their own.

"Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1).

"Put on charity" (Colossians 3:14).

"Walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2).

"Love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22).

Love displays itself as an emotion when another's life is of deep concern to you. It is an alliance of devotion which takes joy in another, sacrificing or even suffering for that person. Analyze what God says about the love we must display to loved ones (I Corinthians 13:4-8). A detailed study, meditation on, and memorization of this portion would benefit any person.

A young wife felt there was continual friction between her husband and herself. On a visit to a pastoral counselor she was told, *"You need a menagerie in your home!"* Puzzled she said, *"We have a cat and a dog, but they don't help much."* With a twinkle in his eye, the advisor replied, *"No, you need two bears in your home . . . Bear and Forbear."*

Keep loving your friends.

God tells us that *"iron sharpeneth iron"* (Proverbs 27:17). We need loving friends who are honest with us, who keep our confidences when we fail, and who pray for us through the burdens of life. In a real sense we must have relationships. We must "love as brethren" (I Peter 3:8).

As we live, we are transmitters of life. When we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us. We can have the joy of being "rivers of waters" to those about us in true loving friendship (John 7:37,39).

Keep loving God.

Loving the Lord is the source of all true love. *"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (I Peter 1:8). Our love for Christ, for God, and for the Word of God must be developed; it will not just happen. Christ must become precious to us (I Peter 2:4, 7, 9; II Peter 1:1). In Him is hidden all the treasures of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9, 10). He is to be our fullness and satisfier. Having a daily LOVE FEST with the Lord is so important. This is when we just spend time before Him in worship, praise, and adoration.

II. KEEP YOUR VISION (Proverbs 29:18).

Our dreams and visions sometimes come true only to be a disappointment. Others become all that we had hoped for and more. We must always give our dreams and visions to God. He must be the source of all our expectations. In another sense we need to have VISION. Spiritual vision allows us to see the unseen, to know the unknowable, and often to attain the impossible. It gives us the distant view of opportunity. When we receive the vision God gives us by faith, then we will trust God for what He can do. We will step out by faith to serve Him as Caleb and Joshua did.

Keep a clear vision.

Once we have a vision we must not let it become muddled. Visions have a tendency to blur and disappear. If you have a God-given direction, do something about it. If you don't, you won't have it anymore. We need a focused vision directed only toward essentials of our goal. This must be a God given direction based on the Word of God and the convictions of the Holy Spirit.

A clear vision must go deeply into the soul with burden and desire that is God given and God honoring and is clearly illuminated by the indwelling Spirit of God (Acts 26:19).

Helen Keller once said, *"I have walked with people whose physical eyes are full of light, but who see nothing in wood or sky, or see nothing in the city streets, nothing in books. Their souls voyage through the enchanted world with a barren stare. But it need not be so."*

Keep an unselfish vision.

Selfishness makes a person void of any desire to be used of God or to minister to others. King David was determined to give an offering to God that cost a sacrifice to himself when the temple was built.

We can be so busy with our interests, our burdens, our hurts, our distresses, our pains, our concerns, etc., that we do not even see with the eye of faith or desire. We will be blind to those about us and their sorrows and needs (Philippians 2:21; II Timothy 3:2).

Keep an optimistic bright vision.

"You will learn," said a successful grandfather, *"that half the fun of life is having more possibilities that you can ever use."* Opportunities do not come easily nor without dedication or cost. They do not come with their treasures on the outside. Each day may present the opportunity of a lifetime, but we must bravely and courageously explore the possibilities of service that God lays before us. He opens doors that no one can shut if we are interested in His will.

Such a vision kept Caleb interested and looking forward to what God was going to do as he waited for forty years. He saw a whole generation waste away because they did not have a vision but doubted the Holy One of Israel. Hebrews chapters three and four have a lot to say about the results of the lack of faith in the *"vision"* of God for the nation in those days. A study of these chapters shows us the failures of a lack of faith. (Hebrews 3:7-15, 19; 4:1-9)

III. KEEP HAPPY (Psalm 32:1, 5; 103:1, 2; Matthew 5:6-9).

The word translated "blessed" could well have been translated "happy." Happiness comes from many things. It includes the expectation of great hopes to be pursued and realized. It comes from exerting an effort, having meaningful, godly goals, having an exciting walk with the Lord, studying new subjects, loving good friends and family, and most of all immersing oneself in the presence of God. It comes from knowing your sins are forgiven, reveling in the promises of God, and recounting the blessings of God (Psalm 111).

Keep laughing.

"A cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine." Exercising good emotions is a major factor in the buildup of our physical chemistry which in turn hinges greatly upon our thought life.

Laughter is something we can create ourselves. It can grow out of the sense of the ridiculous and can bring much joy. God did not expect His children to be long faced. Maybe we take ourselves too seriously.

Keep playing

Play is psychological therapy and allows one to *"visit"* his happy childhood when responsibility does not hamper him. Much could be said about all this, but space does not allow. God gave us richly all things

to enjoy within the confines of holy, honest, and righteous living. Too often we make little of the need of good, old-fashioned, relaxing fun.

HAPPINESS IS . . . If your values are correct, if your life has meaning, you are most likely happy. Read Matthew 5:6-9 using the word "happy" in place of the word "blessed." You will see that genuine

happiness is the outcome of a walk that is in the center of God's will and plan. Faith and biblical living, of course, play an important part in the life of any Christian (II Peter 1:4-12).

Lesson Four

"It is Never To Late to Make a New Start"

INTRODUCTION:

God is not exclusively youth oriented. We older people need to be reminded of that, for we tend to forget that God has an ideal plan for the life of each older person just as much as He does for each young person.

When we were young, many of us, who are Christians, earnestly sought to discover God's plan for our lives, especially when we came to the crossroads of career and marriage. Are we equally desirous to seek His plan for our lives now, or are we just drifting along with no definite aim or goal?

It is easy to become defeated and give up. With more time to review the past, it is easy to become discouraged as we recall opportunities missed, a lessening of zeal in God's service, a mediocre prayer life, or perhaps actual sins of which we have reason to be ashamed. All of these things could cause us to give up and decide that it is useless to serve the Lord in any definite way.

But it is never too late to draw on God's abundant grace and favor and to follow his plan for the remainder of our lives. It is never too late to make a new start. I think that older people often look back with such sorrow in their failures that they give up serving God. They may feel that there is no use in trying. Perhaps one of their greatest needs is to accept God's full forgiveness for sins and failures of the past, besetting sins that dogged their lives, failures for which they have experienced shame -- in all of these they need to accept God's forgiveness and cleansing; Provided they have repented of it all. (Psalm 51; 32:1-5; Isa. 43:25; 44:22; I John 1:7-2:2)

I. LOST YEARS OR OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE RESTORED.

To his discouraged and disillusioned patriots' the prophet Joel brought an inspiring message of hope. God delights in giving His failing children a chance to begin again. Praise the Lord for that!

"Hear this, ye old men. . . . That which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten. . . . And I will restore the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm. . . . And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God" (Joel 1:2-4; 2:25-27).

In Joel, the message is one of hope and of optimistic expectations that God kindled in the hearts of the old men. **"I WILL RESTORE THE YEARS THAT THE LOCUST HATH EATEN."** This is a picture of restoration from barrenness. We can take heart, for the service we need to render for the Lord can take place.

God will accept our new beginnings. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is seen often in the Word of God. Jonah made a new beginning. John Mark must have made a new beginning. Peter had the opportunity of a new beginning. God is a God of grace and long-suffering!

The "locust" can assume many forms -- opportunities given but not utilized, time spent on matters of secondary importance, unworthy motivation, words that have been idle or wounding, or sins that have not been put to death. Some of the "locusts" have robbed our lives of freshness and fruitfulness as well as robbing God of the harvest that is His due. These things can be forgiven, and God can restore opportunities (Psalm 51).

II. GOD IS THE ONE WHO GIVES THE SECOND CHANCE.

Nature seldom offers us a second chance if we infringe her laws. Neither do our fellow men give us another opportunity to make good.

But our God not only forgives our sin and forgets our past, but He offers us a new opportunity, a second chance. This was true in David's life. He became the sweet singer of Israel, a man after God's own heart.

I do not mean by this that we can do wrong and not serve God for years and then have all those years restored and serve God as well as we could have if He had received our full dedication all our life. But praise God we can begin anew.

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:12, 13).

As we turn to the Lord, humble ourselves, and seek His face, God can give us restored service. We can begin to have a ministry that we never had or a renewed ministry even though we were astray for some time.

We can be a vessel unto honor (Jeremiah 18:1-6; II Timothy 2:21). Both of these portions set forth the optimistic possibility of being a vessel that the heavenly Potter can use. Although we may be advanced in years, the future can be better than the past. *"He made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it"* (Jeremiah 18:4). God does not cast us aside as Satan, the accuser of the brethren, would have us believe.

The reworked vessel may not be as beautiful as the one the heavenly Potter originally planned, but it can still become a *"vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work"* (II Timothy 2:21). May we pray~

"Make use of me my God, Let me not be forgot
A broken vessel cast aside, One whom Thou usest not.

All things do serve Thee here, All creatures great and small,
Make use of of me, my God, The poorest of them all."

-- H. Bonar

III. RETIREMENT YEARS BRING A NEW BEGINNING.

The possibility of a new career when one retires can by no means be a mere pipe dream. Retirement can open the door to new and exciting experiences.

There are those who have retired to begin a new ministry. Some have gone to the mission field, others have labored in an office, in Christian schools, in construction of buildings in some foreign land. The sky is the limit, for we are only limited by health, or by our lack of vision, or a willingness to serve anew. Between disengagement from the past employment and disability can possibly be our most fruitful period in life.

The word "retirement" can be a word that holds allurements but often produces shock. Some approach the time with dread and dismay, for they cannot imagine how they will be able to fill in all that extra time that was formerly occupied by their work. If it becomes a crisis (as it does for some), then we have not prepared for those years and how we are going to serve the Lord.

Retirement for some spawns a crop of fears, which if not promptly and resolutely dealt with, may shadow the closing years. They may fear living on a reduced income, loneliness, uselessness, inability to profitably fill in the increased leisure hours, loss of mobility, or of being unable to afford to run a car. The list could go on and on.

"God does not give us the spirit of fear" (II Timothy 1:7). Perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18). When fears assail us and we find it difficult to serve God in the retirement years, then we had better work on a walk by faith in Him alone (Hebrews 11:6; 13:5).

It is important prior to the retirement years to redirect the current of life into new channels of interest and activity so that retirement will not catch us unprepared. We had better examine and look into new ways we can serve the Lord if that is necessary because of physical limitations.

IV. THERE IS A PARADOX IN THE EXPERIENCE OF RENEWAL

The outer man may be wasting away, but the inner man can and must be renewed day by day. (II Corinthians 1:8; 2:4; 6:4-10; 7:5; 11:23-28; 12:7). In all of these passages Paul sets forth the mounting crescendo of trials that beset him and that must have had a great impact upon his physical being. While the outward man, the earthen vessel, was visibly crumbling, Paul was being renewed inwardly day by day.

While disintegration was taking place, a counter process was going on simultaneously. *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"* (II Corinthians 4:16). This can also be our experience, and we can serve God in spite of the physical limitations if we are willing. This light affliction of the difficulties of this life need not move us, for we can live for the things that are eternal (II Corinthians 4:17, 18).

We need not look at the things that are seen -- the pressures, the daily afflictions, the daily problems, but we can die to these things and look at the things which are not seen -- the eternal, the glory of the Lord, and the transforming power which the fruit of His sufferings could work in us (Philippians 4:10; Hebrews 12:1-4). The Holy Spirit can work in us a greater eternal work of glory as we allow the Lord to shine in our lives (II Corinthians 3:18).

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Are we looking for new ways to serve the Lord as we may soon begin retirement?
2. Do we really accept the fact that God can restore and does desire to use each one of us mightily?
3. Are we willing to be innovative, to look for things to do for the Lord, and even to be willing to move if that is necessary in order to begin a new ministry or enter a new field of service for Him? Most of it depends upon our surrender!

Lesson Five

"Difficulties Faced in the Latter Years"

INTRODUCTION:

The problems faced by the older person can seem endless to many. Even earnest Christians who have lived consistent, godly lives sometimes encounter distressful experiences which are beyond their control. They may be worried by the intrusion of unwelcome thoughts which invade the mind, physical stresses and infirmities which are a great burden, or the eruption of unwarranted fears. Such burdens ought not be the source of self reproach, for their origin is hell not heaven and should be treated accordingly.

In this lesson our intent is to deal with some of the "disturbers of the peace" which Christians often face as they get into advanced years.

I. FACING ANXIETY AND VARIABLES (Romans 1:17)

One of the problems faced by those whose income is reduced through retirement, health problems, etc., is the tendency to be anxious and to worry about the future. It is a very natural thing for the elderly to worry about the many unknowns and variables which make up older age.

Christ gave us a wonderful answer for the problem of worry in Matthew 6:24-34 in which He stresses that we are not to be anxious or to have anxious thought. Christ is not denouncing prudent forethought when such is wise and praiseworthy, but He is concerned with our over-concern. He is stating that we are to stop worrying about the future. God is the God of the future, and He is aware of all our needs. The Lord appeals to God's providential and parental care as the ground of abandoning anxiety about temporal or other concerns. Worry is futile, because we cannot recall or undo the past, and we cannot avert disaster or evade the difficulties that may loom in the future (Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

Most of all worry is faithlessness. Worry and anxiety are not hereditary weaknesses but rather a sinful lack of faith and confidence in the Father. "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*" (Hebrews 1:6). We must practice a walk by faith in the midst of the variables and unknowns. Trust and worry cannot sleep in the same bed; they are irreconcilable and antagonistic; the one negates the other. Anxiety is to live unbelieving. Matthew 6:33 teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and all things will be added unto us.

II. FACING THE PROBLEM OF BOREDOM

Those who have led active, busy lives suddenly find themselves in retirement, and simple boredom can be a very real malady. The days present no challenge, and the hours and days drag by. Because of inactivity, life becomes meaningless and the days are filled with no purpose.

One of the most effective ways to overcome boredom is to become interested in the concerns and needs of others. In Philippians 2:19-21 Paul was burdened that only Timothy seemed to care. What a difference it would make in our lives if we would become concerned for the unsaved, disabled, lonely, underprivileged, and burdened around us. If we indulge ourselves in self pity, we will discover that life becomes a great sorrow and very, very empty.

Another danger is that as we become bored, we also become boring, and gradually our outside and social contacts diminish. Then we become all the more withdrawn. This is not a healthy circumstance for our lives. Aging people do not need to become less stimulating or interesting simply because they are older. The choice is really up to us within the given abilities that God allows (Romans 12:9-11; 13:7, 8).

III. FACING THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS

An increasing sense of loneliness is not only a painful result of the aging process but can be caused by many different things -- limited contacts with the outside world, the loss of our friends and loved ones who have passed on in death, and the many "minuses" of older age with growing inability to perform as we once did.

It is very important that we build a close walk with the Lord and know the joy of His presence. We should also cultivate close friendships with a number of people. As the years go by, the circle of friends and loved ones narrow as death takes different ones. Human friendships are subject to the ravages of time.

A social investigator in Europe discovered that thirty percent of retired people when questioned said that they were never visited by anyone! If we are to have those who visit us in our old age, we must also visit in our earlier years (Galatians 6:7-9, 10). If we would reap having others who care for us, then we must care for others in the years of our health.

God's promises to His own

"And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus 33:14).

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14). -28

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:5, 6).

Prayer's compensating results

Fervent prayer cancels loneliness! The deepening fellowship with God will enable us to rove the world in our sympathies and intercessions. Praying for others will help to negate our own loneliness. The happiest and often healthiest people are aging people who are not self occupied but who give themselves to prayer for others (Luke 7:7, 8; James 5:16). Pure happiness and enjoyment of growing older depends far more on our attitudes than on our circumstances however adverse they may be. *"For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).*

Many who are helpless invalids are a pleasure to visit, but with others the case is different. The visitor is treated to a catalogue of aches and pains which are real or imagined grievances of the past as well as the present. After such a recital, the visitor would rather not come again.

We should not resign ourselves to loneliness but use active steps to alleviate such. The common tendency is to withdraw oneself instead of losing oneself in the needs of others.

"If we have longed for solitude and learned to love it because we found God there, it should be that the last years of a long life will be the happiest of all, lived so close to Him that His love and life can shine through us to countless souls." -- Margaret Evening

"Man either transcends his own loneliness in a new encounter with God, or he succumbs to its agony which in extreme cases can end in final despair." -- Alfons Deken

IV. FACING THE LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE

Ideally we would like to maintain our independence to a degree all our life. But often this just does not work out because of a lack of sufficient health to maintain this. Dependence looms on the horizon for most of us, and this is not easy to consider. Frailty or ill health makes that independence impossible. We must accept the will of God in this also.

Leaving familiar scenes, parting with familiar furniture and other treasures, relinquishing cherished responsibilities, being welcomed but not really needed in a physical sense even in a family where one is loved cannot but cause shock and a sense of deprivation. All of this is very difficult. What does the Lord have for us?

** God will never desert us! (Isaiah 40: 4-31; 41:10).

** God will give wisdom and guidance! (Joshua 1:8, 9; Psalm 27:14).

** God will comfort and give a sense of His love and care! (II Corinthians 1:3-5).

V. FACING THE DESIRE TO BE NEEDED

Aging people whose status in life has diminished either through retirement or age need to be reassured that they are regarded as worthy individuals in their own right. Moses was needed in his older age. Caleb felt the fact of his being needed though he was full of years. Health should not control this truth. The presence of godly grandparents and great grandparents can have tremendous influence upon each generation. This should never be minimized by the aging person. God sets forth the importance of the character of the elderly in Titus 2:1-3.

The elderly need to feel that God is not through with them and that opportunity for performing service is still there however small that might be.

CONCLUSIONS: (Caleb--a stirring example)

1. Caleb was a foreigner, a stranger to the common wealth of Israel. His name means "all heart," and he lived up to the ideal of his name.
2. Early in life Caleb proved to be a man of outstanding moral and spiritual courage (Numbers 14:10).
3. He was a man of undaunting faith in a prevailing atmosphere of unbelief. He was one who quieted the people and injected the truth of his invincible faith into a depressing atmosphere (Numbers 13:30).
4. Caleb lived through forty years of constant funerals as he saw a whole generation pass away. Yet he was ardent in his love to God and did not lose his spiritual fervor or desire. So often as we become older, we become insipid and anemic in faith. Caleb maintained his integrity and buoyant faith (Joshua 14:11).
5. His last years were his best as he crowned them with purpose and determination to serve God. He was satisfied with nothing but God's best, and he obtained it. Aging people often lose their spirit of

aggression for God and often shrink from the rigors of spiritual battle. God help us not to be content with mediocrity in our later years!

Lesson Six "DEATH—Enemy or Benefactor?"

INTRODUCTION:

While we are in the glow of our youth, our teens, or our middle years, death seems so far away. Amid the pleasures and pressures of life, we probably seldom think of death except when it is forced upon us. Few approach the thought of death with serenity. The mystery of the unknown is a problem to many.

As we get older, frequent contact with the death of others may cause us to think about death, but we often repress the realization of our own mortality. The fact that few have wills and in many ways do not prepare for death shows us that mankind thinks little of this coming event.

In Hebrews the writer speaks of those *"who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hebrews 2:15). He also says that *"it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement"* (Hebrews 9:27).

Christianity neither magnifies nor minimizes death. It is recognized as the inevitable result of living. Paul describes it as the last enemy to be destroyed but also says that to go and be with Christ is far better even if by way of death (Philippians 1:21). The early Christians came to regard death as a benefactor who was going to do them the greatest kindness rather than as an enemy. Death is the gateway; it is the transition to an unending experience of fellowship with the Holy Trinity for all the saved. The grave is only an underground pathway to Heaven.

I. THE DEATH OF THE SAVED IS PRECIOUS TO THE LORD.

"PRECIOUS in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15). Psalm 116:15 is one of the most comforting and blessed statements in the Scriptures concerning that great event from which the flesh shrinks.

If we would truly make a study of what death is for the saved and embrace God's promises, much if not all of the terrors of death would be removed from us. We often let our imaginations run or give way to carnal fears, for we often do not walk by faith.

Psalm 116:15 is a promise which intimates that a dying saint is an object of special notice unto the Lord. It is true that His eyes are ever upon us, for He never slumbers nor sleeps. It is true that we may say, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"* (Psalm 46:1). God also promises that when we pass through the waters, He will be with us (Psalm 23; Isaiah 43:2).

This is the Godward side of the subject. It gives us God's thoughts about it, for the death of the saint is not hideous, horrible, tragic, or terrible but is indeed precious. Why is it precious?

1. The saint of God is dear to the Lord. We are His saints.
2. The saved are the ones on whom His love was set even before the earth was formed or the heavens were made.

3. They are the ones for whom Christ died and the ones He purchased with His own blood.

4. And all the saved are literally the love gift of the Father to the Son. As members of His body and His bride, we are precious in His sight.

5. We are so important to Him that the very hairs of our head are numbered. He gives His angels charge over us to minister to us in all our ways. Yes, friend, you are precious to Him. Death is a benefactor not our enemy.

II. DEATH TERMINATES ALL SORROWS AND ALL SUFFERINGS.

There is in this life the necessity of suffering, for through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). God does not willingly afflict us, but suffering is a natural part of this life because of the results that sin brings into the world (Lamentations 3:33; Romans 5:12).

God is not unmindful nor indifferent to our trials and troubles (Isaiah 63:9). Christ suffered everything we could ever suffer and more, and He is indeed *"touched with the feelings of our infirmities"* (Hebrews 4:15). He pitieth His own who fear Him and is burdened with their burdens (Psalm 103:13).

Praise God death will bring an end to all suffering, sorrows, tears, heartaches, and trials. The saved will enter into His glorious presence, for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-24).

III. DEATH AFFORDS THE LORD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISPLAY HIS SUFFICIENCY.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity to manifest His love. It is then that the Father says to His trembling child, *"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness"* (Isaiah 41:10).

In death we can with confidence say, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"* (Psalm 23:4).

Our every weakness appeals to His strength; our emergency appeals to His sufficiency. He states, *"He shall gather the lambs [the helpless ones] with his arm, and carry them in his bosom"* (Isaiah 40:11).

Death affords the Lord a special time to manifest His love, grace, and power for His own. He undertakes, and His presence will usher the saint unto Himself. *"I will never, no never, no never leave thee nor forsake thee"* is the meaning of Hebrews 13:5, 6. Death is not our enemy but the entrance into abundant life, for in His presence is fullness of joy.

IV. DEATH AFFORDS THE LORD AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE US UNTO HIMSELF.

All through the gospels it is apparent that Christ desired to have His own, the disciples, with Him. He evidenced all through his earthly ministry His desire for their presence. He took them along to a wedding, a holy feast, the house of Jairus, the Mount of Transfiguration, the garden, etc.

In John 14:1-5 we read of His desire to have us with Him. He has gone on before us as the *"Captain of our salvation"* (Hebrews 2:9, 10) that He might receive us unto Himself. He is preparing a place for us that we might be with Him forever.

While we are sorrowing over the removal of a saint, Christ is rejoicing. His prayer to the Father was, "*Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory*" (John 17:24).

The entrance of each saint into His presence through death is another answer to this prayer to the Father. He shall see the "travail" of His soul and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:10, 11). The death of the saint occasions Him ground for rejoicing as we enter into the consummation of the results of His death for us. Death is NOT our enemy.

V. DEATH'S STING IS FOREVER REMOVED (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

Where is the sting of death? Is it nothing to die? Is it nothing to leave this fair world, a pleasant home, and loved ones? Our hearts yearn for the one who is gone as we bear the pangs of remorse and loss.

But the sting of death has been removed. Christ has delivered us from the fear of death and from its sting. Death can be viewed as a wonderful home-going of the saint of God. It is the crowning day for the saint who has gone on to be with Christ. We need to view it as such and even rejoice with them.

The grave does not have victory, for even the very body of the saint will be resurrected and fashioned anew like unto His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). Praise God for this!

Thanks be unto God who giveth the victory over death and the grave. When death struck Christ on the cross, death lost its sting. When He rose again, He indeed became our "*resurrection and life.*" In that event death lost its holding power (John 11:25, 26). PRAISE GOD FOR THIS!! Death becomes a great benefactor not the enemy. Sin, death, the grave, yes, anything and everything that could hinder has been removed (even hell itself) and nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Lesson Seven

“HEAVEN -- The Best Is Yet To Come”

INTRODUCTION:

The attitude of the aging Christian should be one of excitement and expectancy. For the obedient, yielded Christian there ought to be the conviction that the best is yet to come (I Corinthians 2:9).

There is every reason for the saved to look forward with joyous expectation to the consummation of this life by the rapture of the church. Or in the alternative we look forward to our entrance into His presence through the portals of our heavenly home by the way of death. In either case to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). We, like the saints of the Old Testament, desire a better country--a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:13-16).

For the believer the second coming of the Lord will mean the beginning of the glories of Heaven. We all anticipate the fact that Christ has gone on before us and is preparing a place for His own (John 14:1-3). Our latter years ought to be cheered with the contemplation of the heavenly scene and our presence with Him. The word "Heaven" means simply "that which is above," and is used in a threefold sense in Scriptures. We read of the atmospheric heavens, the starry heavens, and the heaven that is the abode of the Holy Trinity. God's throne is in Heaven (Psalm 11:6). For the saved Heaven is where God is. It is the home especially prepared for the bride--His church for whom Christ died (Ephesians 5:25). It is not a servant's quarters, but instead it is a bridal suite for His own.

Think briefly of the habitation of the city of "eternal life." Just think -- a city without a cemetery -- where there is no dying, no tears, no pain, no sorrow, no sickness, no death, no darkness, nothing that defiles, no pollution, no sin, no grave, no griefs, no regrets, no guilt, no frustration or irritations. Praise God for this place He is preparing!

I. THE THINGS THAT ARE ABSENT IN HEAVEN

All of us who are older and have a lesser or greater degree of infirmities (aches, pains, losses, sorrows) ought to be thrilled about the fact that we will receive a body fashioned after His body. It will be a perfect body without suffering and anguish. There are some things which we would rather NOT have in our lives in this world of tears and sorrows. In preparing this new home the Lord removes everything that would spoil our enjoyment or cast gloom on our spirits.

There will be no more tears.

"He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4). He will take Heaven's handkerchief and wipe away the tears caused by our own sin, wrong-doing, or failure as well as those that have come through every kind of bereavement, sorrow, anguish, and pain. So many things cause tears in this life, but THEN every tear will be wiped away. The ravages of sin cause many to mourn here, but there shall no longer be any mourning or crying in Heaven for the former things will pass a-way. Praise God for this!

There will be no more death.

No longer will there be loss through death. The "*king of terrors*," death itself, the "*last enemy*" will never be able to penetrate the pearly gates. By Christ's death, burial, and resurrection He forever extracted the sting of death, and at last it will be banished from the existence of mankind forever (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

There will no longer be any pain (Revelation 21:4).

There are so many different kinds of pain that we experience -- some are mental, emotional, physical, and even spiritual. We have the pain of disobedience and the conviction of the troubled heart and soul

because of sin (Psalm 32:1-5; 51). We also have pain mentally and emotionally which comes because of the failure of others as well as ourselves. We are sometimes rent emotionally because of the ravages of sin or some physical infirmity. But in the eternal heavenly abode there will be no more pain. Even the fears and dreads of growing older will all be gone. There won't be any need to purchase another batch of medications.

There will no longer be any sickness.

"He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal . . . and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1, 2). In Heaven there will be no sickness or accident to burden, harass, harm, or frustrate our lives. Instead there is the tree for the healing of the nations. We do not understand all about this, but God's care is complete. No believer will ever again turn on a sick bed and no hospitals or doctors will be needed.

There will no longer be unresolved hunger (Revelation 7:16). While possibly now we feel so often unfulfilled and lacking full satisfaction in some areas, we will no longer hunger for the unknown because He will be our all in all. As there will be no hunger problem or need of food, so every deep hunger of the soul will be fully satisfied.

There will be no night there (Revelation 22:5).

What a blessing night is to the animal and vegetable world as well as our own lives. But then we will have no need of rest and renewal. In Heaven our changed bodies will no longer be in need of the recuperative process, for we will experience neither fatigue nor exhaustion. Our bodies will be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21).

There will be no curse there (Revelation 22:3).

Here we live in a world that is under the curse that sin brings. There everything that defiles will be forever out of our sight. The curse is removed and replaced by eternal bliss. Praise God for this!

II. THE THINGS THAT ARE PRESENT IN HEAVEN

There are many positive characteristics of our heavenly home. Not only does the Word of God speak of streets of gold and pearly gates, but things that have spiritual and eternal values as well. We will look at a few things which are present there.

God's glory will be there.

"I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). Revelation 21:23 tells us that this city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it for the glory of God has illumined it and its lamp is the Lamb. Today we may not see much of the glory of God, but then we will enter into His glory. What a contrast to our lives presently for they may seem to be so limited, circumvented, and bland.

God's holiness will pervade Heaven.

We live in a world that knows so little about the holiness of God, but in Heaven His holiness will pervade everything about that place (Revelation 21:27). In Isaiah 57:15 we read, *"For thus saith the high and lofty One . . . I dwell in the high and holy place."*

Beauty will be perfected in Heaven.

We may feel we have seen much beauty here, but there beauty will surpass everything we have ever seen. *"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined"* (Psalm 50:2; I Corinthians 13:10). In Heaven we also will enter into perfection, and His beauty will be upon us as we are made as "HE IS."

Unlimited, unalloyed, unending JOY will be ours there.

"In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for ever more" (Psalm 16:11).

We will be fully satisfied, for He is the fullness that fills all in all. We will be satisfied with our being made in His likeness. In Heaven no holy desire or aspiration will remain unsatisfied (Psalm 17:15).

III. THE THINGS THAT WE WILL DO IN HEAVEN

We will not try and give a complete list herein, for while we have many ideas, we truly do not know all that we will do there. It will be a place of fellowship, rest, holiness, service, and abundance of every kind. We cannot begin to apprehend all that will be ours in that day! But even that phrase shows our limitations of thought, for it won't be but a day -- it will be for an eternity!

We will enter into pure, perfect worship and unhurried adoration. We will delight in joining the twenty-four elders, representative of all redeemed humanity, who fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne (Revelation 4:10). He is the one who is worthy of praise, glory, honor, riches, etc. (Revelation 4:9-11; 5:9-13).

We will have time to enter into music unhurried and perfected which has a prominent place in Heaven. As worship held a prominent place in the tabernacle and temple of old, so it will be in that day (Revelation 5:8, 9). There were 288 musicians employed in the temple service (I Chronicles 25:1-8). What must Heaven's music be like if earth's godly music can lift our souls to such heights of enjoyment and praise to God?

We will enter into service for the one whom we love. *"They will serve Him day and night in his temple"* (Revelation 7:15; 22:3). We will be bondservants who serve Him day and night with bodies which have no limitations. When we serve Christ during His 1,000 year reign, we will have degrees of responsibility delegated to us as a reward of our faithfulness in service on earth NOW (Luke 19:11-19; Revelation 1:6).

We will experience a blessed reunion. As Mary in the garden and the disciples on the Emmaus Road recognized the risen Christ, so we will doubtless recognize one another in that Heavenly land. We will know even as now we are known. For we will have perfect memory or otherwise we would not know who we are, where we came from, nor how we got to Heaven. If that were the case, Heaven would not be Heaven, because we would not even know from whence we came, nor from what we had been saved (Revelation 1:5).

In Luke 16, Abraham said, *"Son, remember . . ."* In the eternal state the unsaved in Hell will have forever to remember. And their memory will be based upon their past in this life. So we also will *"remember."* That is why He will wipe away all tears, for we will indeed remember with sorrow the past life (here and now) and our failures which rob us from the crowns and blessing or rewards in that day. He will wipe these sorrows all away and we will rejoice and worship Him forever, entering into His glory and singing His praises.

Heaven will be a glorious place with a great God and with God's own for all eternity. May we prepare well now and send on ahead the building parts of our heavenly abode for we are laying up for the day to come.

(This series of studies was written while I was on staff at South Sheridan Baptist Church of Denver, CO., Senior Pastor: Dr. Les Heinze. This was shared with the Senior's class with much profit. For many year this church was pastored by Dr. Ed Nelson, who is one of my dearest friends.)