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Finishing Well Ministries

Special Note from the author

What is Finishing Well Ministries?

FWM is an ambitious initiative to change the narrative of aging people in the life of our churches and communities. We see the presence of aging followers of Christ as a growing convoy/peloton of saints purposing to make a greater difference for Christ throughout their aging years. That legacy will strengthen the work of Christ for future generations.

The mission of FWM is to change the ways Christians **think** about retirement. Culturally speaking, retirement means one stops working at a certain age and then begins receiving Social Security. Most seem to understand that this new season means that one steps back, embraces a life of leisure, travel at will, and/or see the world. At that point life changes. Purpose changes.

Thinking biblically, however, God's purposes for His people does not change at the age of retirement. As followers of Christ, we are called to keep growing spiritually, to keep being conformed to the image of Christ, to keep building the church, to keep sharing the Gospel, to keep on being ambassadors for Christ, to keep using our giftedness, and to keep on making disciples in **every one** of our retirement years. FWM aims to keep mobilizing seniors throughout their retirement years.

How to Use This Project

To encourage this biblical mindset in retirement is the purpose of this discipleship project. **FWM** has developed this video series/workbook to focus on six (6) areas of life that will help us live well and finish well. It is particularly designed with retired and aging people in mind. We believe God has an incredible mission for us as we age. The workbook follows the video series. The two are designed for personal use or small group use. Our encouragement would be to use it as a small group – a Sunday School group, a home group, a Bible study group, but one could also use it personally.

Some day in the not-to-far-distant-future, all Christians, particularly aging Christians, will contemplate the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4.6-8;

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

Life goes all too fast. Let's purpose to finish well so that our life will bear witness with our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12.1,2) and with the Apostle Paul. To do just that is the purpose of this video series and workbook.

Consider these words. Dr. J. I. Packer said it this way; **“Runners in a distance race... always try to keep something in reserve for a final sprint. And my contention is that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out. The final sprint, so I urge, should be a sprint indeed.”**

Note: All Scriptural references are from the NASB Updated Version of the Bible. For clarity, we have also italicized all Scripture quotes.

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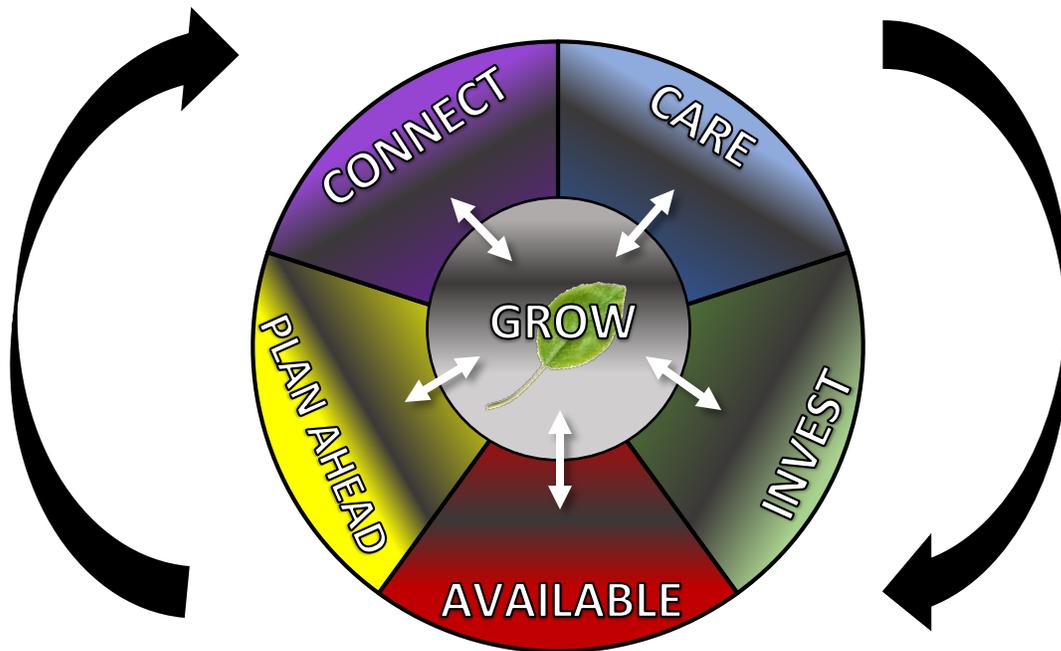
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Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half;" trust God: see all, nor be afraid.

Robert Browning

The Six Essentials



1. We will **GROW** – we will not stay the same.
2. We will **CONNECT** – we will not live alone – we will continue to build strong friendships.
3. We will **CARE** – we will love and be there for others in their needs.
4. We will **INVEST** in generations following us, beginning with our families.
5. We will **BE AVAILABLE** as God calls us to serve others.
6. We will **PLAN AHEAD** for when we are gone.

Welcome to this discipleship project from Finishing Well Ministries. We'd like to suggest the following format to engage this series.

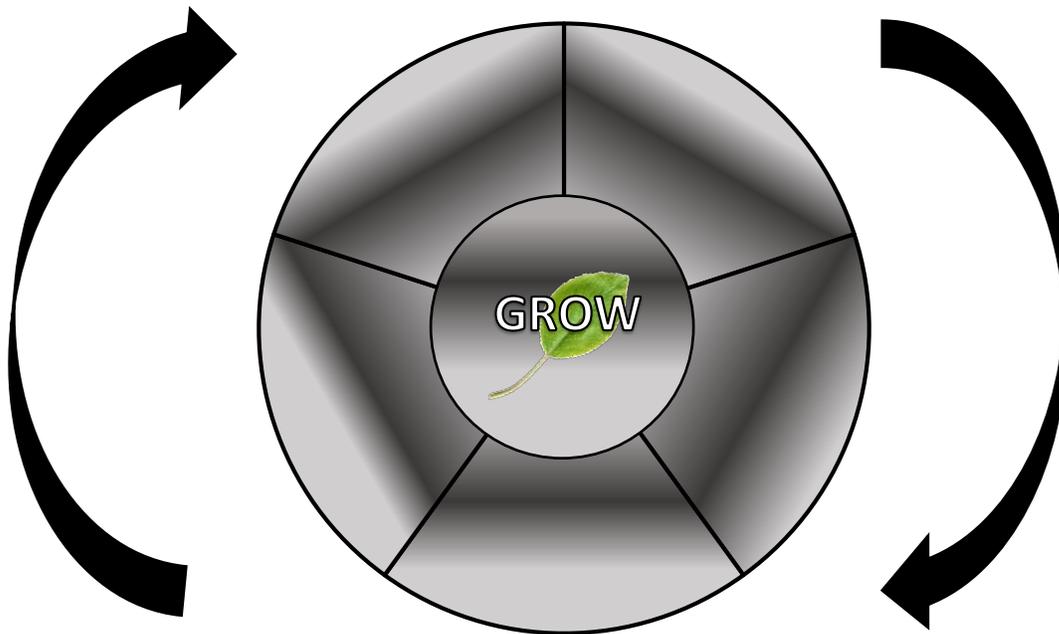
Work on it as a group project. Make it a Sunday School series, a home group, or use it as a small group anywhere. The best practice might be to watch the video and do the homework by yourself or with your spouse before you meet as a group. Then work through the project as a group, discussing the verses and the ideas as a group.

Or, use this project as your own personal growth project.

1. Watch the video that introduces the concept. After watching it, discuss the theme briefly.
2. In each section there will be several biblical verses that focus on each theme. Read them and reflect on them as it relates to the theme. Again, this can be done as a group project or as an individual project. Write your thoughts in the allotted space before the group meets together. Give some time to think about each concept and verse. If this is a group, discuss the impact of these verses on each theme.

3. Then, as a group project, think together outloud about this theme. We suggest using a white board or a flip chart, putting GROWTH on one side and BARRIERS on the other side. Ask and answer the question; What does GROWTH mean to you? Write your responses. Follow the same process with respect to BARRIERS. How do these BARRIERS hinder or derail growth?
4. Now, can you put into words what God is calling or leading you to in the area of growth in your life? How are you developing a growing sense of divine mission in this crucial season of your life? In what ways might He be calling/leading you to grow? What barriers holding you back might He be calling you to address or break down? Write those thoughts and share them with the group, your spouse, or with a friend.
5. This project would serve well as a 3 month/12 week study project – 2 sessions on each lesson. There is more than enough material here to extend it even further.
6. Note – this discipleship project is not an exhaustive study. It is not designed to cover each topic in great detail. It is simply designed to help us each wrestle with the purpose God has for us in our aging and retirement years, or as Browning implies, the best years of our lives.
7. We also hope that those who work through this study will pass it on. Do it with others. Do what you can to mobilize seniors in your church and/or around you to be about the work of God as never before. “Retirement” is not a release from making these aging years the best years of our lives for Christ (Philippians 1.21). Keep making disciples (Matthew 28.19,20).
8. When you’ve completed the project, give us some feedback. Write us at hal@finishingwellministries.org.

1. We Will GROW – we will not stay the same.



We begin with growth. Growing is at the core of life. Consider these general thoughts.

Proverbs 4.23 – *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”*
Growth comes from the heart. How is your heart growing? How are you growing?

We always want to grow – God means for us to grow in every way. Jesus grew (Luke 2.52).

God’s desire is to keep growing us into the image of Christ (Romans 8.29).

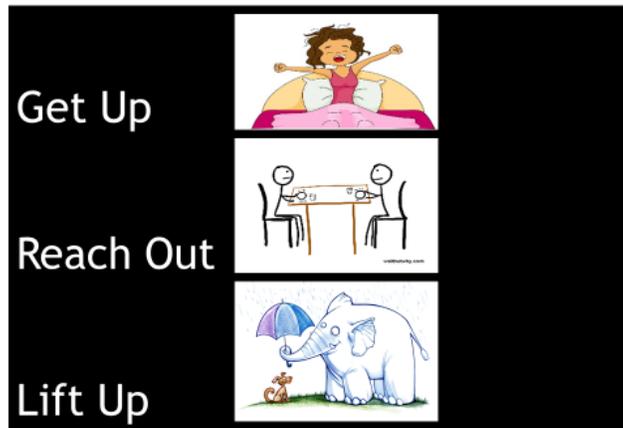
We must be alert to resist that which grows into our lives through pride and sin as those things grow against the work of God within us.

We want those little people in our lives to grow. No parent would want to see their kids or grandkids not grow. Babies are born to grow.

We want to grow in understanding what’s expected in our maturity process in life. Are we growing in wisdom, education, relationships, work, and in the work of life?

Having said this, we are surprised that adult education (continued growth) tends to slow and diminish with age. Why is that? Why does the growth curve slow with aging years? Discuss.

God has designed us to grow, and He calls us to keep growing. This simple graphic captures the idea of getting out of bed each morning with a mission in mind to keep growing.



Basic Thoughts for Growing

Disciples of Jesus are learners – a disciple is a learner. The word “disciple” means “learner.” The verb form means “to learn.” Each day provides an opportunity to learn and grow. In this aging season of our lives, we have countless opportunities to learn how God is calling us to grow and what He wants us to be in this season of life. Each day is a new day. There is an adage about fishing that goes like this; “You never fish in the same river twice.” The river is always changing. That’s true of life as well. Each day is different than the day before. We ourselves are different. God keeps giving us the opportunity to grow.

Life is about change. Every day brings change – physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Generally speaking, we resist change as we age. Growing may seem harder as we age. The aging process, however, does not mean that our growth slows. God calls us to grow at every age.

Consider These Scriptures

Read through each Scripture listed and ask yourself the following questions.

- How does the author of each Scripture think about continued growth?
- What might God want me to know through this particular Scripture about the importance of continual growth? There is space below each Scripture to write your own thoughts about what each verse may teach about growth.

Biblical Verses

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but **I press** (pursue) on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **reaching forward** to what lies ahead, **I press** (pursue) on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.12-14).*

How did Paul want to keep growing? How old was he when he wrote these verses? Where was he when he wrote these verses? How enthusiastic was he about growing in this season/stage of his life?

(Note: The word “press” Paul uses here means “to put to flight” or “persecute.” The word itself carries with it a desperate action – the idea of “fleeing persecution,” but here the word is used in a positive sense. He is desperate about growing in his life – pressing on. There is nothing casual about the action. He is desperate about pursuing Christ. He is desperate about pursuing the mission Jesus has for him. In your own words write how Paul characterizes his life in these 3 verses.

*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is **being renewed day by day**. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4.16-18).*

How does the body change as we grow older? What happens to the inner man as the physical body weakens and changes?

*For if these qualities are yours and are **increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins (2 Peter 1.8-9).*

*But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Peter 3.18).*

How does Peter think about continued growth? How old was Peter when he penned these verses? How significant is it that Peter emphasizes the significance of continued GROWTH as the final words of his 2nd letter?

The next two verses speak of being continually conformed to the image of Christ. No matter how long we live, God's desire is that we keep on continually being transformed into the image of Christ. How can we keep being conformed to the image of Christ more and more as we age and life changes rapidly?

*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to become conformed** to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8.29).*

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3.18).*

How does Moses, perhaps the oldest of all the Psalm-writers, think about the learning and growing process of each day? What is it that he thinks God wants him to learn? What do we think God desires to teach us in these aging years?

*So **teach** us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90.12).*



Just as the hourglass slowly moves ahead, Paul saw the finishing line of his life drawing close. I see him as lunging towards his appointed day of standing in the presence of God. I see him growing towards his desired destination in life. How do you see this strategic verse relating to growth, and what ought we to be learning as we near the end of life?

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the **future** there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, **will award** to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4.7-8).*

I love what John Stott says about needing a healthy appetite to keep growing – even in our aging years.

“There is perhaps no greater secret of progress in Christian living than in healthy, hearty spiritual appetite. Again and again Scripture addresses its promises to the hungry. God 'satisfied him who is thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things' (Psalm 107.9). If we are conscious of slow growth, is the reason that we have a jaded appetite? It is not enough to mourn over past sin; we must also hunger for future righteousness” (Authentic Christianity, # 481, “A Hearty Appetite”).

Do you and I have a healthy appetite about growing? Yes? No? or Maybe? Why or why not?

The above Scriptures and the theme of growth seem to go against the drift of our culture. “To retire” literally means “to stop” or “to disengage.” When one “retires,” we stop going to work. Our economic productivity stops. When we “retire” for the day, we usually go to sleep.

When well-known athletes retire from the game, they stop playing and the # they wore may be retired to the rafters or walls of the arena. Therefore, we will resist and reject our culture’s understanding of aging. Most of us grew up in an age-graded culture that essentially says this; we go to school, then we go to work, and then we retire. In contrast to this common cultural perspective, we argue that we go to school our entire lives, we work our entire lives, and, if we are wise, we learn to take respites along the way.

To the contrary of our cultural pattern, we continue to grow in Christ every day of our lives. We are continually ambitious to keep serving Him. We advocate a different perspective. We as believers will not become conformed to this world of retirement (Romans 12.2), but our views on the retirement season of life ought to be along the lines of Robert Browning and the first stanza of his epic poem, Rabbi Ben Ezra;

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, “A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid.”

In all of life, we believe it is very empowering to recognize that we have some control of what we eat, how we choose to exercise, what we believe spiritually, how we exercise our faith, and how socially engaged we are in helping others and living life courageously. We want to keep growing.

We also want to keep growing in becoming more self-aware as persons. Growing in self-awareness is a life-long process. Understand one's giftedness, weaknesses, and personal tendencies is a never-ending growth process. List some areas of your life and relationships in your life in which you sense God is calling you to grow.

For example, the simple illustration on continued personal growth which follows here is from a friend, Don McMinn, and is used here by permission. Don writes a weekly thought that has been very helpful to me, and I would encourage you to subscribe to it. (Don McMinn <don@donmcminn.com>)



A beaver ate one of my vines, then he ate four more.



Two years ago, I planted a vineyard in East Texas, about an hour's drive from my house. Cultivating a vineyard is hard work (basic agriculture), but it's cathartic. Next year I'll harvest Blanc du Bois, Tempranillo, and Black Spanish grapes.

Grapevines are vulnerable to many things—insects, disease, mold, mildew, aphids, small animals, and birds—but I had not considered the havoc a beaver can wreak on a vineyard. Birds and small animals eat the grapes but ignore the plant. But in less than a minute, a beaver can chew through the trunk of the vine (about six inches from the ground) and everything above the chew-point dies. The plant lives (because the roots remain intact) but it's back to ground zero relative to growth and grape production.

One weekend I went to the vineyard and noticed that one vine had been compromised by the local beaver. The first solution I considered involved lead, but then I'd be arrested by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

I came back two weeks later and Mr. Beaver had chewed through four more vines. Now he's compromised five vines, about ten percent of the vineyard. That weekend I installed plastic grow-tubes on all the vines, which took care of the problem.

But what I've been thinking about is this: after I noticed the first beaver-eaten vine, why didn't I realize he would inevitably eat more and why didn't I take preventive measures that very day? Why did I wait two weeks before I took action? What character flaw in me caused the problem, how did it develop, what other areas of my life has it affected, and how can I change so that it doesn't plague me the rest of my life?

So, this minor life-event has become a learning opportunity.

It didn't take me much thought to notice how this weakness has played out in other areas of my life. Several years ago my car was running rough but instead of taking it immediately to a mechanic, I put it off several months and, of course, the problem got worse. My house needs to be painted but I've put it off for so long that now some of the wood trim is rotting.

The first thing I considered was, procrastination. But I don't think that's the prime issue because I'm basically a get-it-done person and pride myself on doing things sooner rather than later. I don't think procrastination is the core problem.

I've thought about this for about two months, prior to writing this post. So far, here is my analysis.

The issue of not dealing with the car running rough and my house needing to be painted, I traced to a downside to being frugal. As I've mentioned in other posts, I grew up in a very poor family and frugality was a necessary survival technique. Through the years it has served me well—I'm a good money-manager—but it also has its downsides—postponing needed repairs because I'm reluctant to spend the money. [Note to self: change that inclination.]

But that diagnosis doesn't explain my slowness in protecting the vines from beavers. I already had the grow-tubes so money wasn't an issue and it only took two hours to install them, so time wasn't a factor.

I'm still searching for the core reason I allowed Mr. Beaver to get the best of me.

*The purpose of this post is not to bore you with the details of my vineyard or the idiosyncrasies of my struggles. What I want to illuminate is this: **becoming self-aware is a life-long quest.** I'm 67 years old and I'm just now gaining clarity on this nuance of my life; I wish I had seen it sooner.*

Know this: there are behaviors and patterns in your life that you are unaware of. Some of your idiosyncrasies are positive, others affect you negatively. The key is to identify them and give them their proper place.

When you do something odd or unproductive in life or when someone else comments on an unattractive behavior in your life, take time to analyze the situation and try to resolve it. Constantly pursue self-awareness.

So why don't we keep growing?

This kind of consistent personal growth is critical for spiritual growth. Since approximately 80 percent of older persons belong to congregations, and their involvement in these congregations helps to buffer many of the negative aspects of aging, ***nevertheless the church ought to rigorously encourage these 80% of seniors in congregations to keep growing as never before.*** Oft times even in the church, we keep seniors busy with trips and activities, but we fall short of encouraging seniors to make these aging years the most productive spiritual growth years of their lives. Why is this?

Consider the lament and challenge of the late Dr. Howard G. Hendricks; *"Old age is as important and meaningful a part of God's perfect will as youth. He is interested in both the waxing and waning of life. Just as potential is locked up in young people, and often never developed, so the full possibilities of old age often remain dormant and die with the person. The work of God will be greatly enriched when more attention is given to releasing and utilizing this hidden resource. Older people represent the greatest potential resource and labor pool within our churches, though consistently ignored."*

Stanford psychology professor, Dr. Carol Dweck, says this about growth. "She divides the world between learners and non-learners, demonstrating that a fixed mindset will limit your growth while a growth mindset can move you forward."

Before reading any further in this workbook, take some time to think creatively about growing. On one section of the board, think outloud about what GROWING means. List your thoughts. On the other side of the board make a list of some BARRIERS to growth. What keeps you from growing? (We'll make this simple exercise a pattern concerning each of the *6 Essentials*.)

GROWTH

BARRIERS

As you think about barriers, remember to think about the work of our enemy the devil, Satan himself. He aims to destroy us (1 Peter 5.8). How might he be using these barriers to keep us from growing? The apostle Paul reminds us that we are constantly engaged in a spiritual war with our enemy (Ephesians 6.10-17).

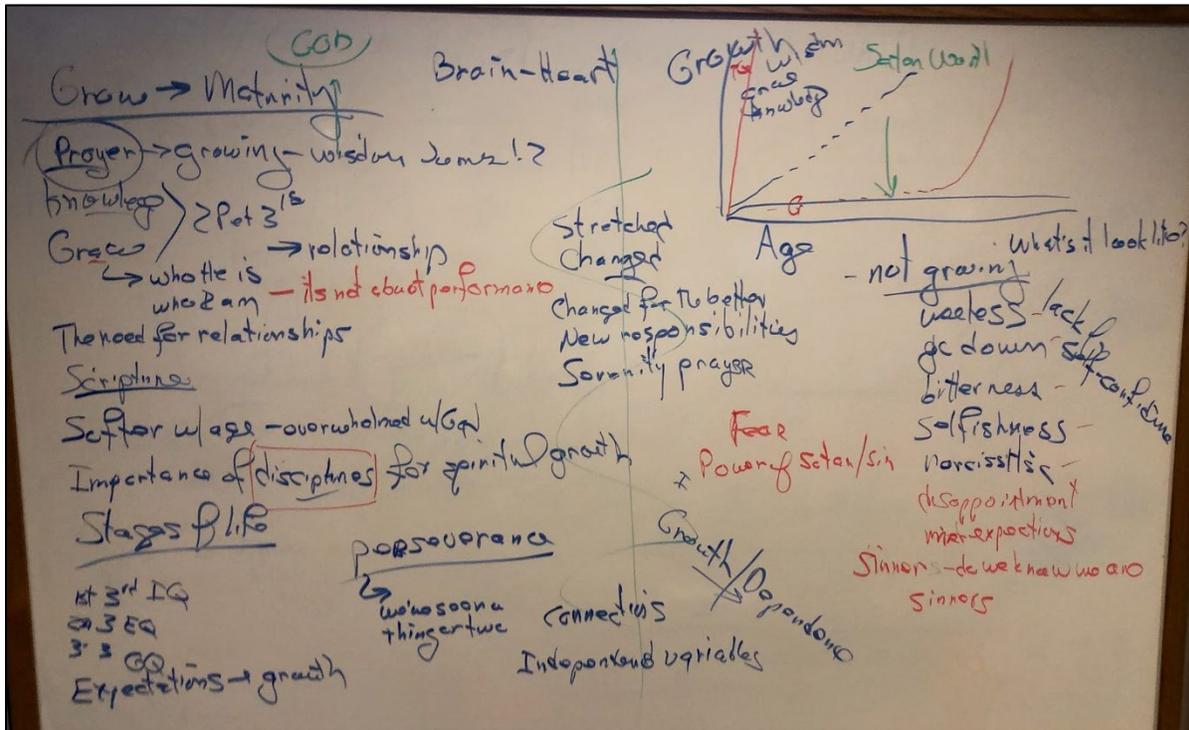
An Important question: How does Satan work to keep us from GROWING?

Here are some thoughts/ideas from others who have had these discussions.

- Growth is related to maturity – we’re not just talking about growth but growth in maturity
- Growing in wisdom through prayer – James 1.2-5
- Growing in knowledge - 2 Peter 3.18
- Growing in grace – who He is, who I am – it’s not about performance
- The need for relationships
- Growing in knowing the Scriptures
- Growing softer with age
- Growing in your marriage
- Growing in your relations with your family
- Importance of disciplines/patterns for spiritual growth
- Growing in self-awareness
- Stages of life
 - 1st third of life – IQ (Intelligence Quotient)
 - 2nd third of life – EQ (Emotional Quotient)
 - 3rd stage of life – GQ (Growth Quotient)

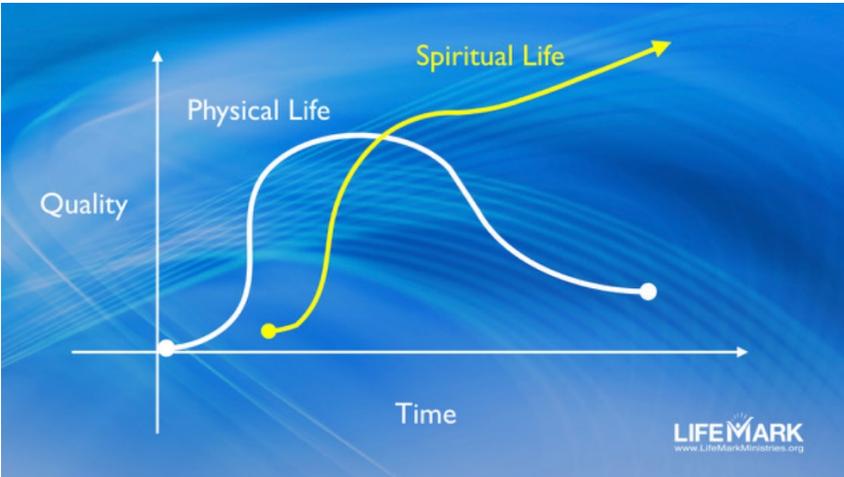
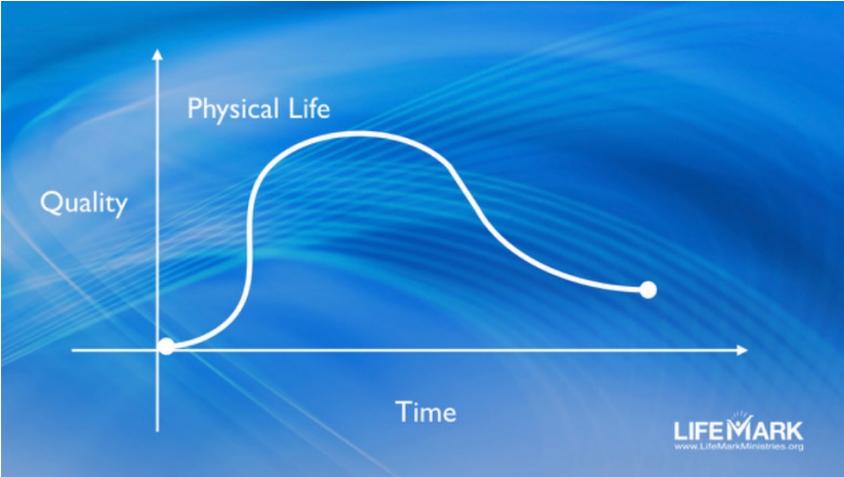
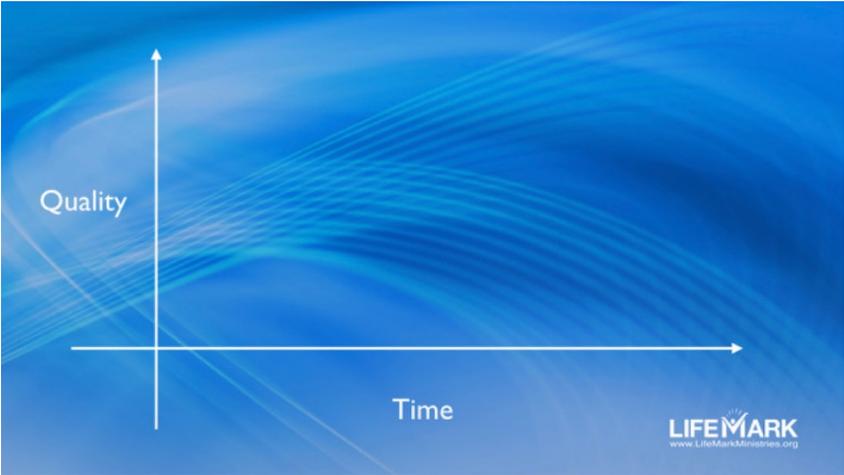
- What are our expectations for growth?
- Perseverance – “we’ve seen a thing or two” – Farmers Insurance
- Thinking/Planning – what is the connection between the heart and the brain?
 - Keeping both your heart and your brain active and young – use them
- We thought about some synonyms/parallel ideas for “growth”
 - Stretch/stretched
 - Changed
 - Changed for the better
 - A growing maturity
 - New responsibilities
 - Serenity prayer
 - What others come to your mind?
- What are negative synonyms of growth? What does the lack of growth look like?
 - Useless
 - Disappointment
 - Bitterness
 - Anger
 - Selfishness – self-centeredness – absorbed with self
 - Laziness
 - Narcissism
 - No expectations
 - Stagnation
 - Deterioration
 - No real sense of purpose/mission
- Your age? Does growth plateau at a certain age?
- What are barriers to our growth?
 - Fear
 - Sin
 - Power of Satan (he doesn’t want us to grow, does he?)
 - Lack of self-confidence
 - Isolation
 - Casualness
 - Busyness
 - Lack of courage
 - No sense of mission – lack of direction or goals

A picture of one group's discussion time.



What would a “growth” chart look like for you? Does your “growth” steadily increase with you age? Pick an area of your life, or pick a character quality, and chart your growth (spiritual life, marriage, family relationships, using your mind, etc.) Are you growing? How are you growing?

Or, consider these charts from my friend, Mark Schupbach from LifeMark Ministries. How would you reflect on your own growth?



Consider These Selected Summary Statements Regarding Growth

“I am 72, and I have determined at that I will keep learning every year for the rest of my life. I never want to stop learning.” President George W. Bush

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.” Henry Ford

“The future belongs to the learning, not to the learned.” Mary Louise Rowand

“In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” Eric Hoffer

“Once you stop learning, you start dying.” Albert Einstein

“When you stop studying, you are dead.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, President, Dallas Theological Seminary

“When your memories are more exciting than your dreams, you’ve begun to die.” Howard G. Hendricks

“You never get old until your regrets take the place of your dreams.” Bill Gaither, Gaither Music

“A man does not grow old, but one becomes old by not growing.” Fred Smith

Assignment: Would you take a moment and write your own personal mission statement and thoughts about continuing to grow? How will you keep growing? These summary questions might help you in writing a mission/purpose statement for your life now. Share your thoughts with the group.

Growth/Lifelong Learning – we are always the sum total of what we are becoming. Aging years are critically important for all that we are. God’s desire is that we keep learning/growing about who we are. Aging provides the opportunity to live out what we are learning/becoming. We are not “vaulted” (locked up) people.

- What am I learning and how am I growing in these years?
- With all that I’ve had, in light of how I am growing now, and in light of my unique, God given design, what do I believe is my “highest and best” contribution in advancing the cause of Christ on this earth?
- Given my gifts and abilities, what type of activity offers the greatest potential for service to the Lord and others?
- In what direction is God leading me to invest my time, talent and treasure?
- What are the opportunities in my life now?
- Learning about yourself as you age – increasing self-awareness in all areas of life

My mission is ...

As a church, what are we doing or what can we do to encourage the aging community of our congregation to make these years the best growing years of our lives?

Growing Through the Hardships of Aging

We add one final word concerning our growth. Perhaps our greatest growth may come through the most difficult of challenges, whatever they may be. Whether those challenges come through aging challenges/hardships, or just the general challenges/hardships of life, let's grow through them (James 1.2-5).

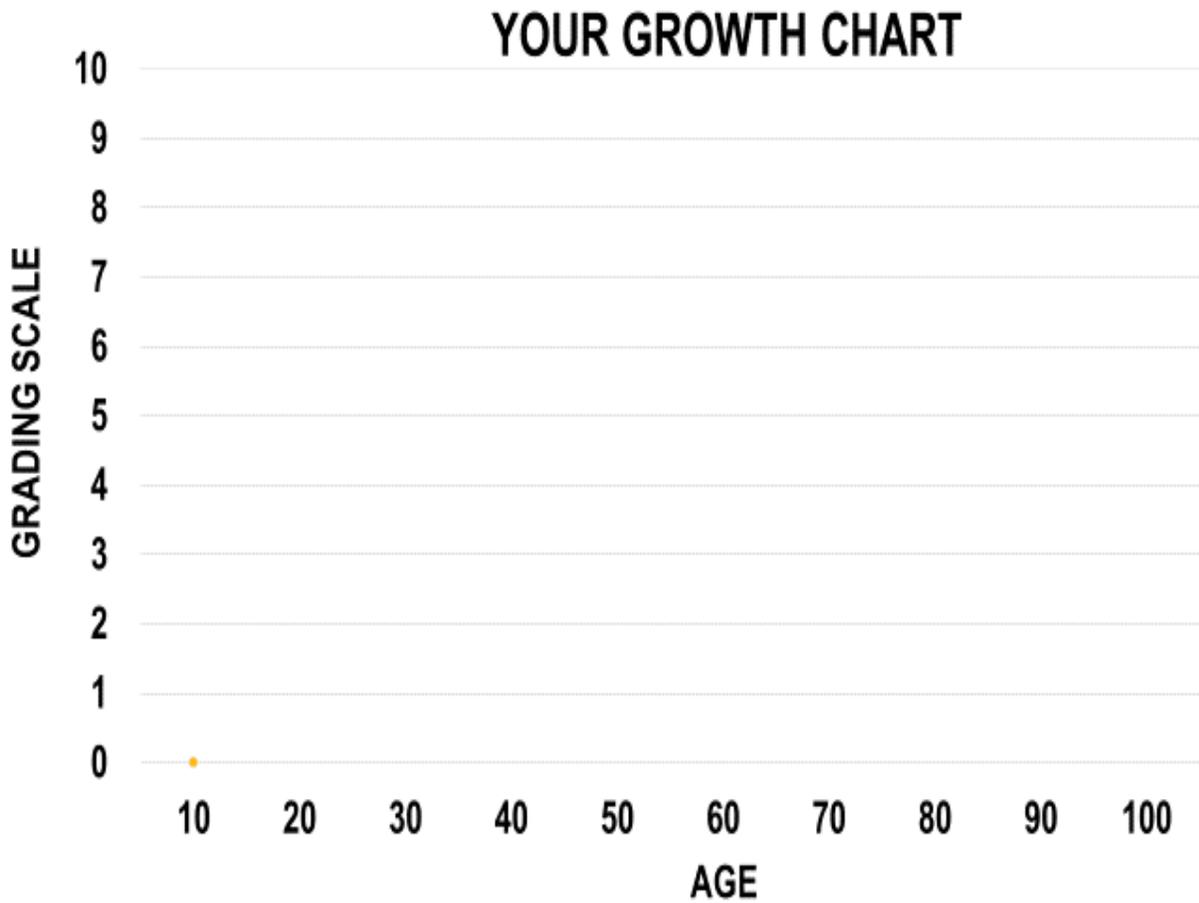
“Embrace the difficult circumstances you find yourself in, even when you feel they will overwhelm you. Allow God to mold you through the events He allows to enter your life. This will make you flexible toward the will of God. The events of life are like a furnace for the heart. All your impurities are melted and your old ways are lost. The intrusions that God sends you will no doubt upset your plans and oppose all that you want. But they will chase you towards God.” (Francois Fenelon, The Seeking Heart, Seed Sowers Publishing, p.14 [Quoted also in The Softer Side of Leadership: Essentials Soft Skills That Transform Leaders and the People They Lead, Eugene Habecker, p.100]).

Think of Jesus who learned and kept growing through His own difficulties. What do you learn from Jesus and how He encountered His own suffering and hardships?

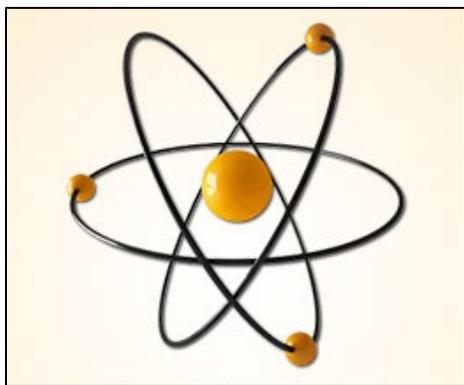
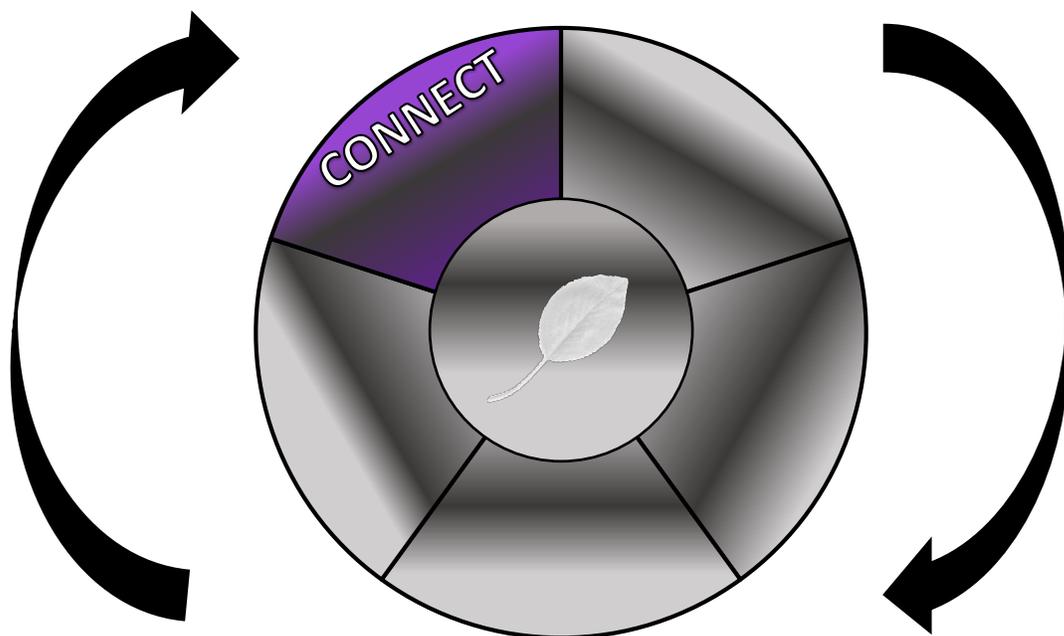
But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings (Hebrews 2.9-10).

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5.7,8).

In conclusion, a blank growth chart follows. Use it in graphing and/or thinking about various areas in your life. How are you growing? Are you stagnant? Are you declining? Are you indifferent to growing? How would you chart your growth through difficulties? Through the difficulties of aging? Be honest.



2. We will **CONNECT** - we will not live alone - we will continue to build strong friendships



Nothing exists by itself. For example, consider the basic building block of the universe – the atom. In every atom, particles are all connected. Each atom is its own universe of connected elements. God has created the world to be connected.

What is the value of strong, personal friendships according to the above verses? Are strong friendships still essential in our aging years?

Jesus placed a high value on friendships and being connected. He modeled it for us.

No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15.15).

How does this verse speak to being connected? Do you share the core issues of your heart with close friends?

*A friend loves at all times,
And a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17.17).*

According to this verse, what is the value of a “brother” or “sister”?

And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that he could send them out to preach (Mark 3.14).

Why did Jesus choose 12 men to do life together?

The human body is connected. No one part or cell (except cancer cells) lives by and for itself. Ever! The spiritual Body (the church) is connected. Why is this verse important with respect to being connected to each other? Are we more connected or less connected as we age? Why does the world of aging people tend to grow smaller?

For just as we have many members in one body members and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12.4,5).

Friendships and connectedness really are the strength of the church? They are also the strength for living life well. Why?

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10.24-25).

How is the writer of Hebrews calling us to be connected in these verses?

*Therefore, since **we** have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding **us**, let **us** also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles **us**, and let **us** run with endurance the race that is set before **us**, fixing **our** eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12.1,2).*

Think about the plural pronouns used here and impact of these two verses on “being connected.”

Consider this African proverb: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”

In terms of the sociology of aging people, gerontologists Antonucci and Akiyama use the term “convoy” to describe the importance of connectedness in the aging years. Reflect on this paragraph.

*The Convoy Model of Social Relations calls for radical friendship in every community. The term convoy is used to evoke the image of a protective layer, in this case, of family, friends, & colleagues who surround us and help us to negotiate life’s many challenges and opportunities. Each of us, if we are fortunate, are moving through life surrounded and supported by a group of people with whom we receive and give support. I think our convoys are dynamic and, if we are fortunate, lifelong in nature, changing in some ways but remaining stable in other ways across time and situations. I have a rich convoy or a band of brothers and sisters, consisting of family, trusted old friends from childhood, fraternity brothers, military friends, academic colleagues, students, and even Narnia-like creatures. (Taken from “The Social Networks in Adult Life and a Preliminary Examination of the Convoy Model,” [Toni C. Antonucci](#), [Hiroko Akiyama](#) *Journal of Gerontology*, Volume 42, Issue 5, September 1987, Pages 519–527).*

What do the terms “convoy” and/or “peloton” bring to mind with respect to “connectedness”?

Let’s think through some practical insights to reflect on the importance of being connected with others. What comes to mind as you think about being CONNECTED along with BARRIERS.

CONNECTED

BARRIERS

As in the first section, here are thoughts from a previous FWM group as they reflected on being CONNECTED and BARRIERS to being CONNECTED.

- a. Be kind to
- b. Share with – offer to pray
- c. Helping/serving

- d. Listening/being available
- e. Encouraging
- f. Engaging
- g. Be kind to others
- h. Smile – people you know, people you don't know
- i. Touch – hug
- j. Ask questions
- k. Ask names
- l. Play games

Barriers

- There are risks –
- You may be rejected – past rejections
- Culture may not value older folks
- Physical limitations
- Failures
- Past hurts – people may not want to connect with you
- My own failures
- My sense of worth may make me feel I have little or nothing to offer

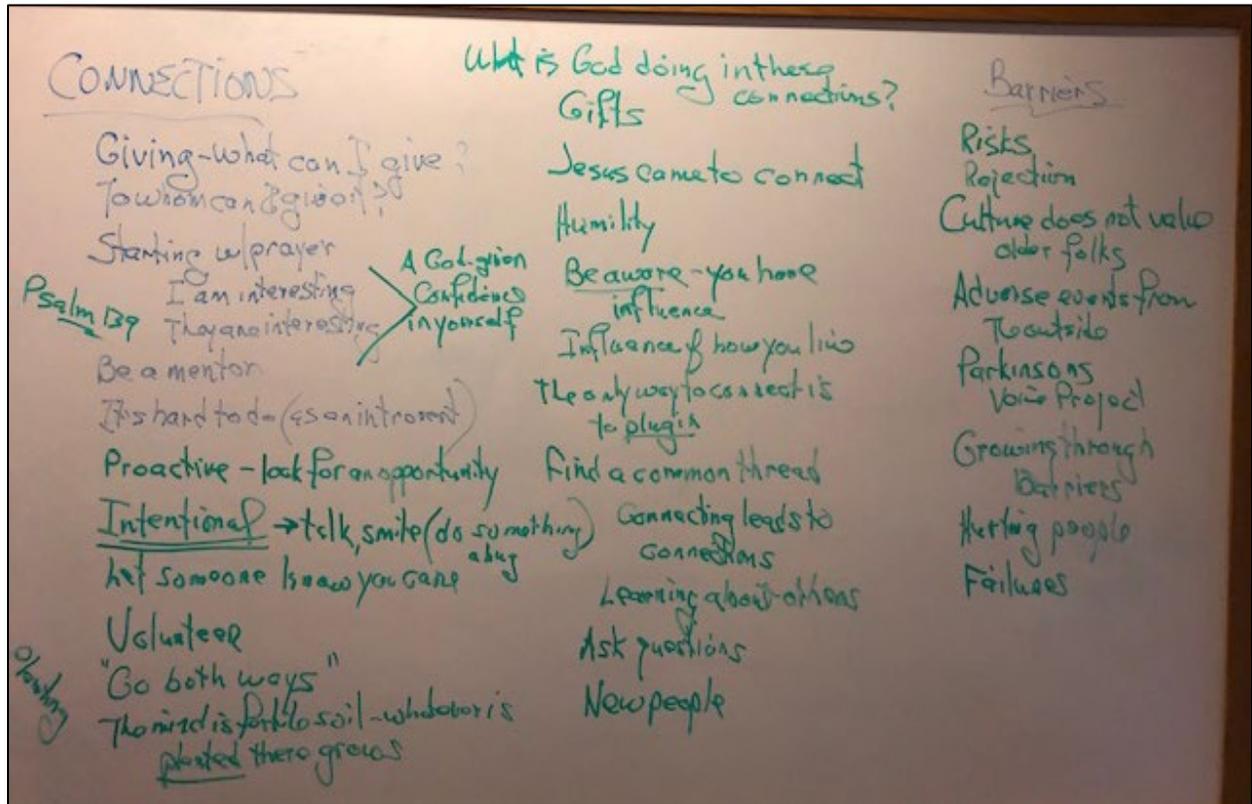
These thoughts from Jim Stump capture the importance of relationships.

“You and I are hardwired for relationships. We were created by God to love and to be loved by others. We were created for much more than casual friendships or acquaintances. We need deep and meaningful relationships with those God has put into our lives. We need people who will walk with us through the ups and downs of life, who will be there for us when times get tough, and who will look to us for help and support in their own struggles.

We need people who will intentionally invest in our lives. People who will pray for us when we are sick, counsel us when we're confused, laugh with us when we are happy, defend us when we're under fire, and offer a shoulder to cry on when life gets hard and cumbersome. People who will always be there for us, no matter what. People who need us as much as we need them” (Jim Stump, The Power of One-On-One: Discovering the Joy and Satisfaction of Mentoring Others, p.141).

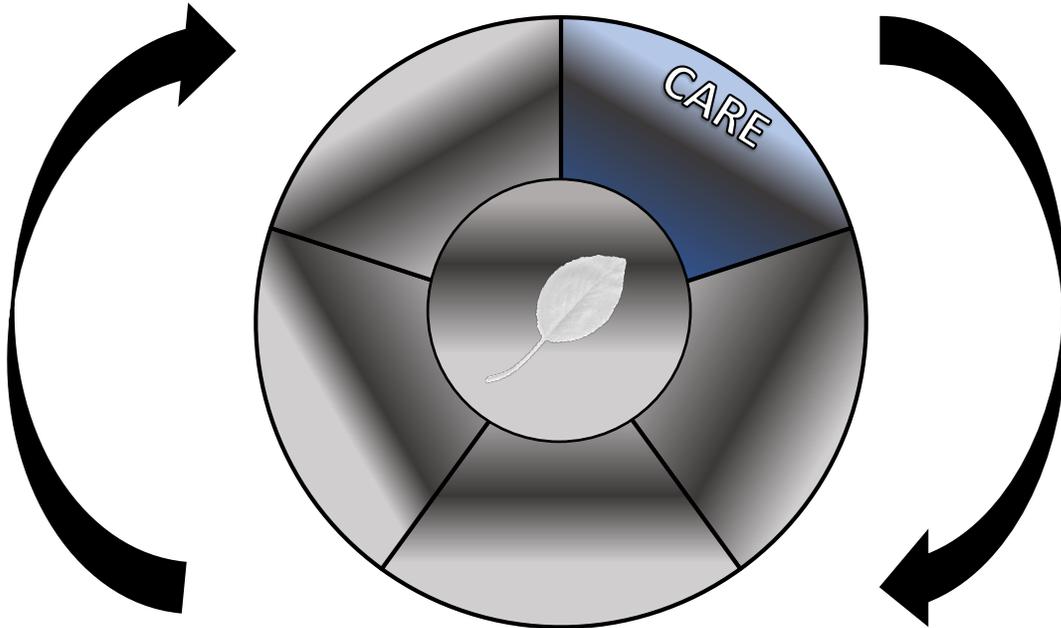
An Important Question – How does Satan work to keep us from CONNECTING?

Our Picture



Assignment: Would you take a moment and write your own personal mission statement and thoughts about continuing to connect with others? How will you keep connecting? Share your thoughts with the group.

3. We will CARE – we will be there for others in their needs – we will love each other as Christ commanded us to love.



In this section we want to look into being connected at a deeper level – through love. Our model for caring is our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s look at His life first and reflect on the depth of His love and care for us. Following each Scripture, summarize in your own words the depths of His love and care. How did He love? How did He care?

Consider Jesus

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12.1-2).

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5.21).

What does it mean that Him “who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf?” How does His example for us speak to us about caring for each other?

Read the next few verses and then describe or note the depths of what Jesus did for us according to the prophet Isaiah.

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him (Isaiah 53.4-6).*

The apostle Paul exhorts us to seek to live just as our Savior lived. Read these verses and then summarize the way He lived.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2.5-8).

Having first considered Christ’s own love for us, we now consider Christ’s new commandment for all who follow Him. The mark of our relationships with each other now follows His example in the way He loved us in.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13.34-35).

We are called to love each other as Christ loved us.

Consider a few of these general biblical guidelines for our relationships with each other. How can these verses apply in our aging years?

Consider Each Other

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6.1-2).

What does it mean to restore another person or to bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ?

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2.7-8).

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you (Galatians 4.7).

Is there a relationship between loving someone as Christ loved us and wanting to “labor” on behalf of friends to see Christ formed in them? Explain.

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1.28-29).

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Romans 12.9-13).

As a group, discuss the impact of caring – what does it mean, what does it look like, and what are the barriers that keep us from being a caring person or a caring community in our aging years?

Care	Barriers

The Importance of This 3rd Essential (loving each other as Christ loved us) in Our Aging Years

As we age, the process of aging physically inevitably begins to catch up with us, and those aging challenges may present a whole new set of challenges for us. The apostle Paul noted this fact; *“Therefore we do not lose heart; though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day”* (2 Corinthians 4.16).

Can you make a list of the changes that often happen to the body as we age?

It is in light of these aging challenges that we remind ourselves and the church that our responsibility as followers of Christ is to love each other as Christ loved us.

How can we help each other in our aging years to love and to care for each other well?

Here are some other questions to consider.

1. Does our church have a responsibility to help care for and love our older members?
2. How can we encourage others and keep loving them as we all age?
3. What needs do others have that we could meet?
4. How might the church develop a strategy for caring for the needs of its aging members?
5. How might this strategy include younger folks from across the congregation?

Summary of the discussion one group had as they contemplated the above.

Begins with Connecting – using “divine platforms” that God has already provided for us through our various “platforms” in life – learning names, details, etc.

Caring means...

- Growing and building relationships
- Continuing the dialogue – listening, learning, and taking it further
- Ensuring the well-being of another – taking the role of being a shepherd to them – caring for them

- Having alertness to needs and doing something about those needs
- Being pro-active – constantly vigilant

Caring requires...

- Caring grows out of a growing connection/relationship with God – knowing how much He cares (vertical and horizontal are interconnected) – the more we know and understand that He cares, the more we will care
- God leads us in these growing relationships if we listen to Him
- Through prayer, ask Him for wisdom (James 1.5)
- Looking at the model of healthcare - healthcare is about meeting needs. It is about service which is what we ought to be about
- In a sense, caring requires “losing a sense of the future and living in the moment” – that’s what the Good Samaritan did (Luke 10.30-37). He did not say, “I’ve got to get to my next meeting,” nor did he say, “I’ll call the church and ask the pastor to follow up.” He did it.

Barriers to Caring...

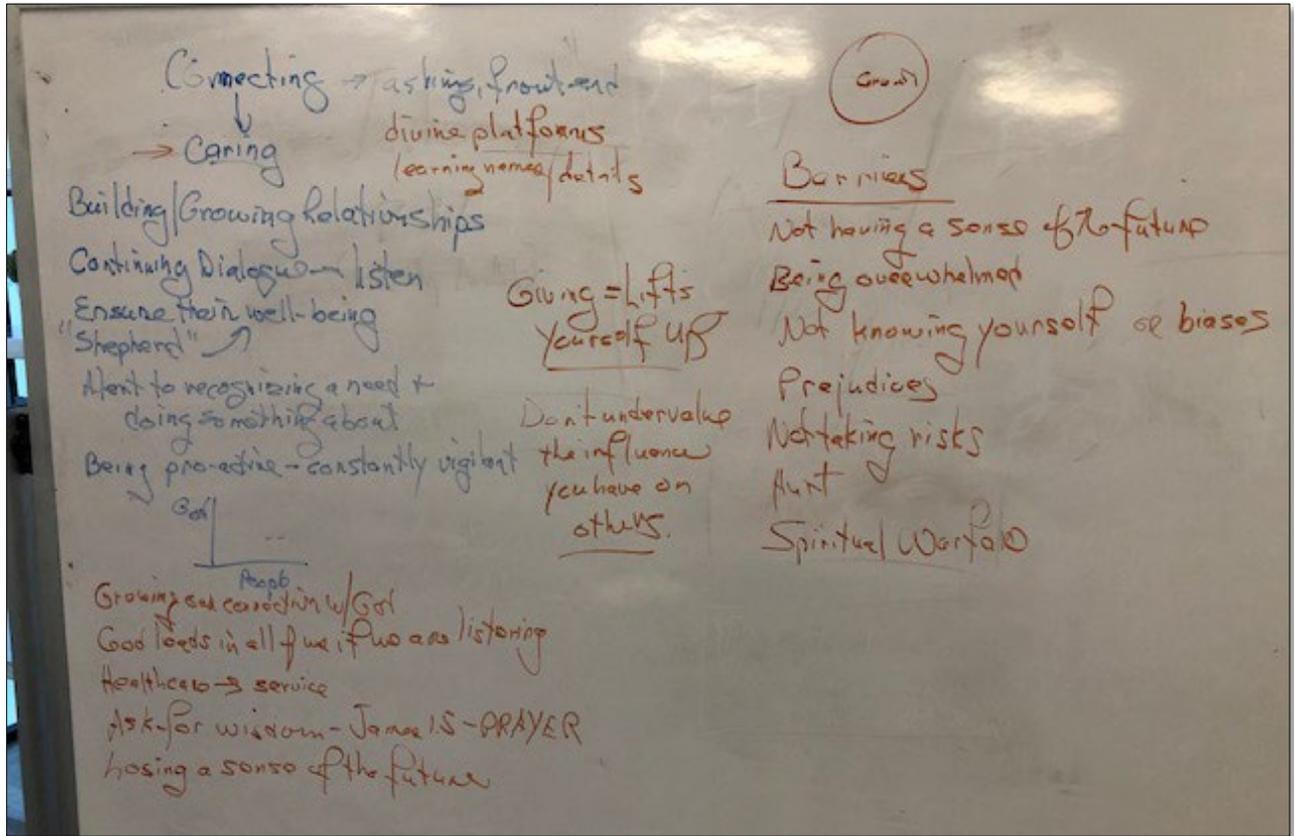
- Not having a sense of the future, realizing the difference we can make in the life of another person
- Not realizing that God values me – knowing the difference I can make in the life/lives of others
- Having biases against/prejudices against others which will preclude caring
- Not wanting to take risks – What will they think? Will I be rejected?
- Protecting myself from being hurt
- Spiritual warfare – Satan doesn’t want me to get involved. Caring may draw me deeper into the spiritual battlegrounds of those for whom I care. Satan will tempt me to “play it safe” and if that doesn’t work, he will attack me.

In conclusion...

- Caring and/or giving your life away really lifts yourself up – when we care/love we are becoming more like Christ.

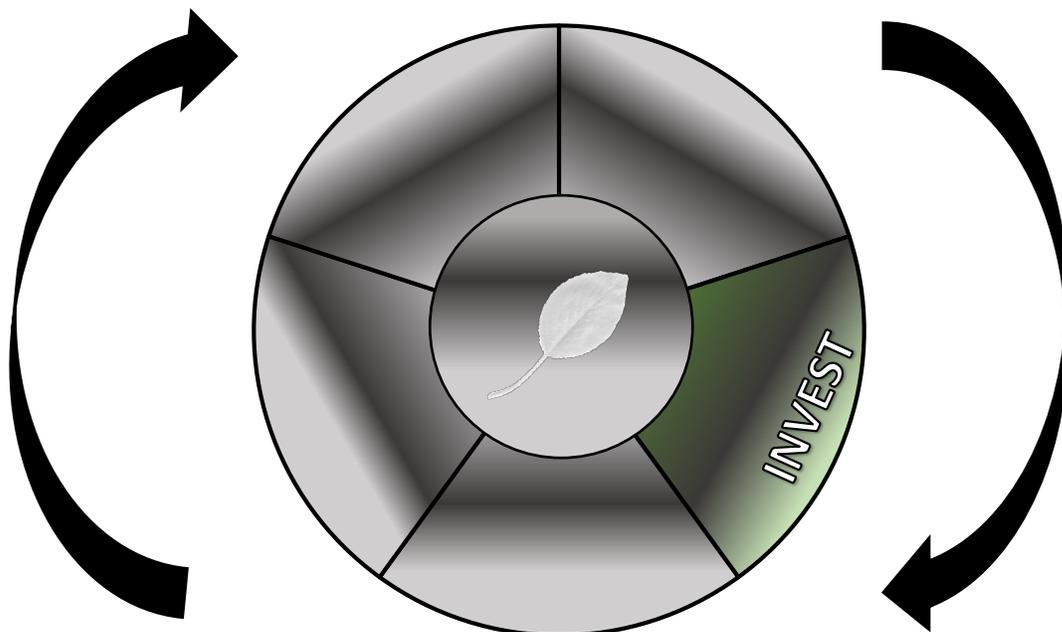
An important question: How does Satan work to keep us from CARING?

Our Picture



Assignment: Would you take a moment and write and expand on your own personal mission statement and thoughts about continuing to care for others, as Christ cared for others? How will you keep growing in showing love to fellow seniors and to others in general? Share your thoughts with the group.

4. We will INVEST in the generations following us



As we consider this 4th essential, "Investing," consider these questions and discuss them as a group.

- Why does God allow us to age? Why did He ordain the aging years as a part of life?
- What are His purposes in our aging years?
- What are the advantages for each of us in having older and younger people in our lives?
- What are the advantages of older people in the life of a congregation?

We'd like to suggest at least two ideas.

First, God wants us to keep growing and trusting Him for all that He wants to be to us and in us in our aging years. Regardless of the hardships we face in the later years, God wants us to keep growing, to keep connecting, and to keep caring and loving those He designs to be a part of our lives (that's our summary of the first 3 essentials).

Second, we are convinced that one of the reasons God leaves us in this life for our aging years is for the purposes of pouring our lives in the generations that follow us. The following key Scriptures bring this biblical truth and personal conviction into clear focus.

Investing in Future Generations

*O God, You have taught me from my youth,
And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.
And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to this generation,
Your power to all who are to come (Psalm 71.17-18).*

*One generation shall praise Your works to another
And shall declare Your mighty acts (Psalm 145.3).*

*For He established a testimony (a witness) in Jacob
And appointed a law (a standard) in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,
That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,
That they may arise and tell them to their children,
That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep (obey) His commandments (Psalm 78.5-7).*

Crawford Loritts makes these 5 wonderful observations growing out of this text.

1. We need to be the patriarchs and matriarchs who will lead the way and call our families to trust God. God calls us to intentionally nurture and instill a “God-confidence” in the hearts of our grown kids and grandkids.
2. We are here to steward the vision of God from one generation to the next.
3. We will continue to teach our children building on decade after decade, telling the stories of God’s faithfulness, again and again.
4. We will press to fuel future generations with a passion for the character of God and a confidence in the truth of Scripture.

5. As parents and grandparents, we pray for the generations to come. We pray for our grandkids and our great grandkids. We pray for the generations that we will not see.

Consider the biblical patriarch Joseph and the blessing he was to the generations of his family at 110 years of age. He gave them a legacy of hope.

Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50.22-26). How is Joseph investing in his family?

Only heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons (Deuteronomy 4.9).

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6.5-9).

Describe what you believe these two passages teach about family life as we age.

For myself, I have typically thought about and taught these verses as though they applied primarily to children in our homes when they were younger, when they lived in our home. As I have aged, however, I now think that these verses are as appropriate to our adult children even as they were when our children were younger. We as older adults have the mission of continuing to teach and be living examples of faithfulness to our adult children and grandchildren as much as when our children were young.

Would you agree?

*It is the living who give thanks to You today, as I do today;
A father tells his sons about Your faithfulness (Isaiah 38.19)*

How do we talk with our grown/adult kids about God's faithfulness to us? Isn't this part of mentoring and discipling our own families?

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28.19-20).

Discipleship is adult education. How do we as aging Christians keep making disciples at our age?

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2.1-3).

According to the apostle Paul's relationship with Timothy, what might he say our role is with our own adult children and/or with the younger generations of our church?

Now, do the following project together. What does “investing” your life into your adult children and/or younger adults in your congregation or community mean to you? What barriers keep us from doing this?

Investing	Barriers

Applied to Our Culture and the 6 Generations in Today’s World

- The Silent Generation
- The Greatest Generation
- Boomers
- Generation X
- Millennials
- Generation Y (iGeners)

Considering the generations following you, what kinds of things might you be able to do that would open doors to making investments into their lives?

In our own church community, how are we “discipling” younger people in the generations following us?

Speaking of the church, we need to be reminded that the church is a multigenerational organism. Investing into the generations that follow and surround us is a critical assignment for both life and church leadership. Are we doing that?

Furthermore, consider the challenge of multigenerational leadership and body life ministry from Acts 2.17;

*“AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS, God says,
 THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
 AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,
 AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,
 AND YOUR OLD MEN WILL DREAM DREAMS.”*

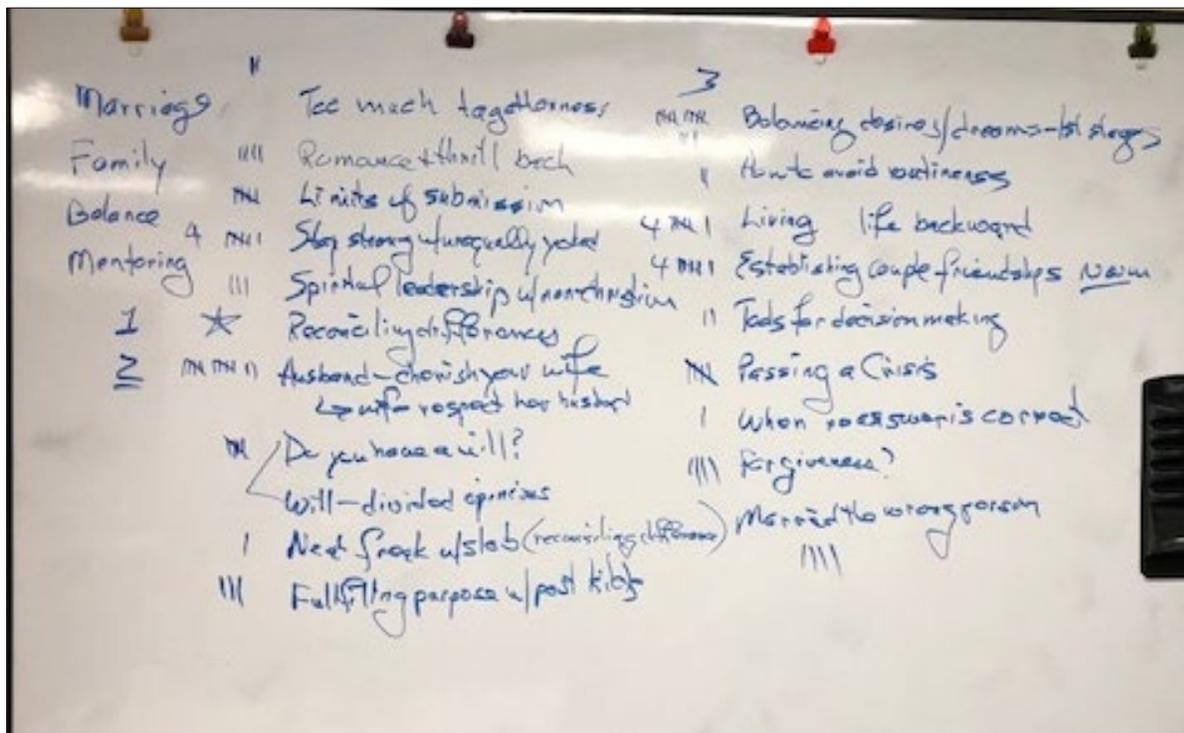
God’s Spirit calls the generations to work together in building His church. Are we doing that?

Here are some thoughts from previous groups that discussed investing in generations following us.

Ideas/Conversations about Investing

- Our families
- Friends at church
- Friends in our community – our profession
- Show an interest
- Invite them to your home for a meal
- Share your history/your story
- Write them
- Pray
- Anything/Everything
- Life History
- Hardships
- Gifts
- Text - Call
- Common interests – share your own interest

Our Picture



Dennis Rainey's book, Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood, chapters 4 & 5, and have been very helpful to me on this point. In his book, he lists 5 stages of manhood but I only want to share the last two as those two stages address retiring boomers and seniors, the focus of Finishing Well Ministries. (While Rainey's book is addressed to men, I believe these principles apply equally to women as well as men.)

- The Fourth Step: Mentor
- The Fifth Step: Patriarch

Consider Rainey's words;

"A mentor is a life coach - a tutor and instructor who recognizes that he has the privilege and duty of passing a baton in a generational relay race. Stepping up and becoming a mentor can be one of the most definitive and courageous steps a man makes in his lifetime."

Every man needs a mentor, and every man needs to be a mentor. We need another man to speak into our lives, cheering us on, imparting the courage to persevere, summoning us to keep stepping up. In turn, we need to mentor others. This is our generational responsibility" (p.147)

"A mentor purposely builds life lessons into those he mentors. As you consider being a mentor, think through what makes life work for you – at work, at home, and in your relationship with Christ. What have you learned about the following?

- Handling pressure and balancing the pace of life
- Working with people
- Building and keeping friendships with other men/women
- Investing in your marriage
- Resolving conflict
- Facing unexpected crises or tragedy
- Managing your finances
- Developing a real relationship with God
- Reading, understanding, and applying the Scriptures
- Raising your children
- Developing the type of character needed to succeed at work
- Growing through failure" (p.157-158).

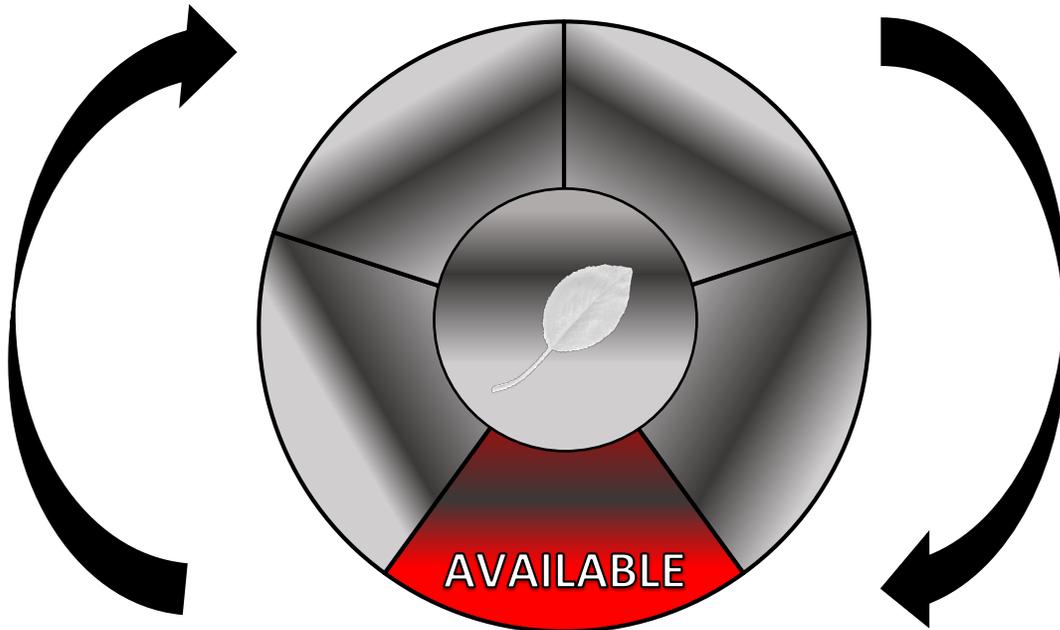
Remember, reaching retirement age does not mean for one moment that we have the luxury of not continuing to pour our lives out for the generation following us. God calls every disciple to continue giving his life away for the blessing and encouragement of others.

Have you considered the invitation and challenge of being a mentor to the younger generations around you in your church or community?

Assignment: Would you take a moment and write and expand your own personal mission statement and thoughts about continuing to invest in those in your family and others around you? How will you keep investing? How are you making disciples? Share your thoughts with the group.

An important question: How does Satan work to keep us from Investing?

5. We will be **AVAILABLE** - as God calls us to serve



“Being Available” simply means being open to new ways and new people through which God leads us. He often leads us in ways we might never have dreamt.

For starters, how did we get together in this room today? God arranged it. He arranged it through friendships. God works through “random” events. I am where I am today because of people I’ve met and experiences I have had that have changed me. I didn’t plan it that way.

Consider some basic scriptures.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
And do not lead on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3.5,6).*

*Now the LORD said to Abram,
Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing (Genesis 12.1-2).*

Was Abram available? Why?

Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed (Deuteronomy 31.6-8).

Was Joshua available?

*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 (Psalm 139.16).*

Am I available to do what God ordained for me in these aging years?

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another (John 15.16-17).

Am I available to love those God sends my way?

Think of several biblical examples of how God often works through happenstance, random, and/or unplanned events in life.

Luke 2.1-7 – the birth of Jesus and the census from Rome. Joseph and Mary were available to serve God, to give birth to the Son of God in Bethlehem, and to serve as his parents. They were available.

Luke 10.30-37 – The story of the Good Samaritan (v.31 – “and by chance a priest...). The priest and the Levite were not available (why?), but the good Samaritan was available to take care of the wounded man. He wasn’t planning or anticipating this event in his day, was he? He was simply available.

Acts 9 – Saul’s conversion. Saul was available to answer God’s call.

2 Kings 5.1-5 – the little captive servant girl and Naaman’s leprosy. The little servant girl was available to be the voice of God to her mistress for Naaman’s healing..

John 9. 1-5 – the man born blind. The same might possibly be said for all Jesus’ miracles. Jesus happened to be there – He was available and those He touched and healed were available.

Romans 8.14 – those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God (the Spirit has a plan). Am I available to the Spirit for His purposes today?

Consider the story of John Stuart Gilbert in [From Eden to Paradise](#).



John Gilbert was diagnosed with Duchenne’s Muscular Dystrophy at the age of 5. When he was about 8, he was the poster child for muscular dystrophy and attended a fundraiser/auction for MD in Sacramento. The fund raiser was sponsored by the NFL and therefore oriented to athletic objects. Though he was wheelchair bound, John actually raised his hand to bid on a basketball autographed by every player of the Sacramento Kings. He says that he never felt so many G forces as when his mother pushed his hand back down as they

had no money for an object like this. For some unexplainable reason, the bidding on the basketball continued to rise. Finally, the auctioneer said “Sold,” and he looked at a gentleman across of the room to come and receive his purchase. The businessman came to receive the ball, but he did not return to his seat. Rather, he turned and walked across the room to where John was in his wheelchair, and he gave him the ball. This man noticed John’s desire and gave

of himself and his resources to meet John’s need. He was available. (From Eden to Paradise: Something Stronger Than Time, An Autobiography by John Stuart Gilbert, A Father’s Reflections by Bruce Stuart Gilbert, Xulon Press, 2012, pp. 77-79).

This story is etched in my mind forever. Here was a man who happened to see a need and he gave himself to give the basketball to John. He was **available** for a greater cause that particular day.

It seems to me that this is the way God works. He places opportunities before us, and we can say yes or no to the opportunity before us. What opportunities surround us today? How might God want to use them in our lives today? We’ll never know unless we say “Yes”.

As I think back across my own life, it seems to me as though all of my life has simply been saying “Yes” to opportunities and the people God has placed before me.

That is the challenge to each of us as we age. Will we be the kinds of men and women who will simply say “Yes” to the opportunities God keeps placing before us in our aging years?

We may call it serendipity – God calls it sovereignty, and He shapes our lives through His plans for us (Proverbs 3.5,6).

God will do the same through our aging years if we are alert to Him. He will do that today if we are alert.

Consider how Jesus illustrates this great truth through Luke’s witness. “*He went about doing good*” (Acts 10.38). Jesus was always available for the people His Father brought into His life. Should it be any different for you and me?

Let’s think together about being available and barriers to being available.

Being Available	Barriers

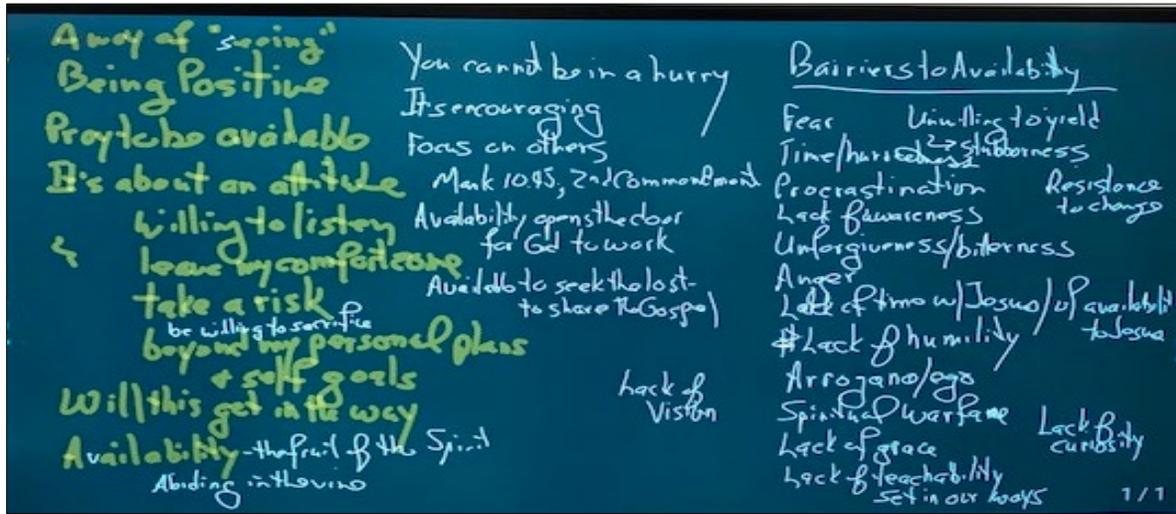
Conversations Together on “Being Available”

- It's a way of seeing
- Being positive
- Pray to be available
- It's about an attitude
- Be willing to listen – focus on others
- Leave your comfort zone to follow God/others
- Take a risk – be willing to sacrifice
- Beyond my personal plans and self-goals
- Will this get in the way? Of what?
- Availability – the fruit of the Spirit
- Abiding in the vine
- You cannot be in a hurry
- It's encouraging
- Mark 10.45; 2nd great commandment
- Availability opens doors for God to work
- Availability to share the Gospel – seek the lost

Barriers to Being Available

- Fear
- Unwillingness to yield - stubbornness
- Time – hurriedness
- Procrastination
- Lack of awareness
- Unforgiveness/bitterness
- Lack of curiosity
- Lack of grace
- Lack of teachability – set in our ways
- Lack of vision

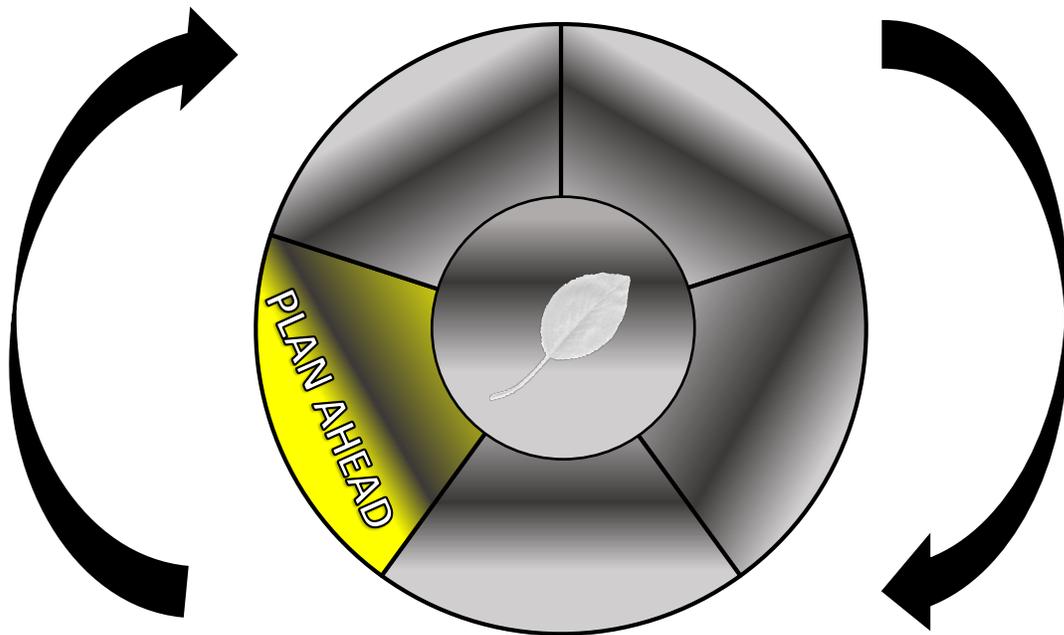
Our Picture



Assignment: Would you take a moment and write your own personal mission statement and thoughts about continuing to be available? How will you be available and keep being available?

One final important question: How does Satan work to keep us from BEING AVAILABLE?

6. We will PLAN AHEAD - for when we will not be here.



William Hazlitt wrote that no young man believes that he will ever die, and the truth of the matter, I think, is that in some measure that is true of all men. Intellectually we all know that we will die, but we do not really know it in the sense that the knowledge becomes part of us. We do not really know it in the sense of living as though it were true. On the contrary, we tend to live as though our lives would go on forever. We spend our lives like drunken sailors (Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*).

What do you think of Buechner's statement?

*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* (Psalm 139.16).

What do you think God meant for us to know and experience when He "ordained" our aging years when it comes to the final season of life, our dying?

Somewhere in this discussion, I'd like to suggest to the group to take time to share your own experiences regarding death. What were they? How did they impact you? Then consider these verses.

*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven —
A time to give birth and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3.1-2).*

*Remember what my span of life is;
For what vanity You have created all the sons of men!
What man can live and not see death?
Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah (Psalm 89.47,48)!*

*For all our days have declined in Your fury;
We have finished our years like a sigh.
As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;
For soon it is gone and we fly away.
Who understands the power of Your anger
And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?
So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90.9-12).*

Remember also 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"; before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 12.1-8)!

*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
And come to an end without hope.
Remember that my life is but breath;
My eye will not again see good.
The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer;
Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be.
When a cloud vanishes, it is gone,
So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.
He will not return again to his house,
Nor will his place know him anymore (Job 7.6-10).*

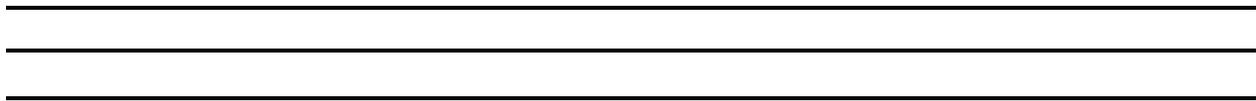
*Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.
Like a flower he comes forth and withers.
He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.
You also open Your eyes on him
And bring him into judgment with Yourself.
Who can make the clean out of the unclean?
No one!
Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with You;
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.
Turn Your gaze from him that he may rest,
Until he fulfills his day like a hired man.
For there is hope for a tree,
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
And its shoots will not fail.
Though its roots grow old in the ground
And its stump dies in the dry soil,
At the scent of water it will flourish
And put forth sprigs like a plant.
But man dies and lies prostrate.
Man expires, and where is he?
As water evaporates from the sea,
And a river becomes parched and dried up,
So man lies down and does not rise.
Until the heavens are no longer,
He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep (Job 14.1-12).*

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9.27).

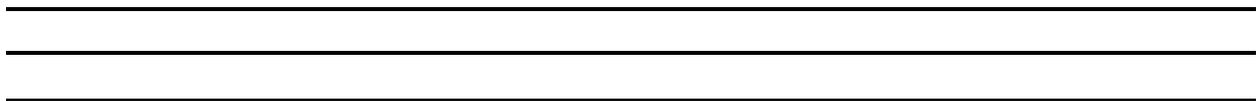
Without death we cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

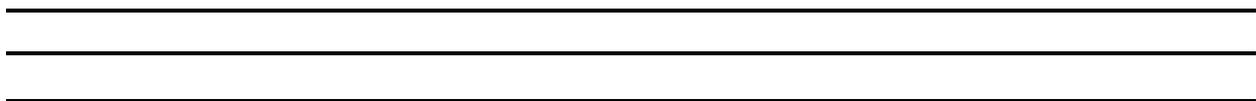
Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15.50-58).



For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge (2 Corinthians 4.1-5).



Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5.6-10).

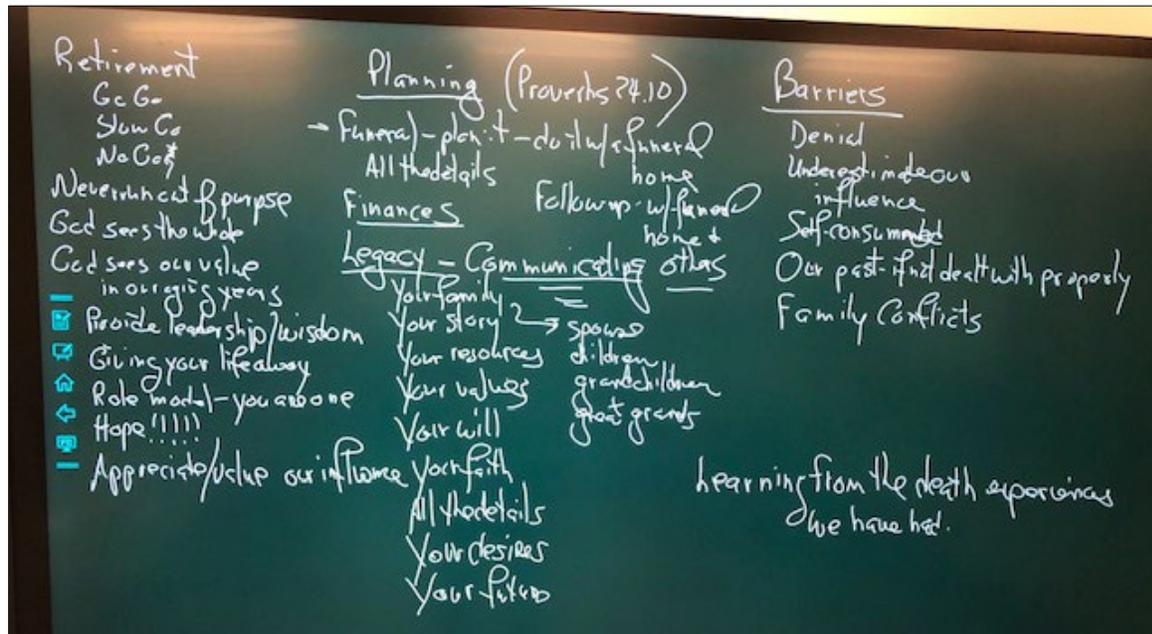


Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50.22-26).

Let's think together about "planning ahead for when we will not be here."

Plan Ahead	Barriers

Our picture of one group's conversation.



Summary of the Above

- Retirement has 3 stages – GoGo, SlowGo, and NoGo
- We never run out of purpose
- God sees the whole in our aging years
- We can continue to provide wisdom/leadership in our aging years
- Let's keep giving our lives away
- We continue as role models
- We offer hope
- We can appreciate and value our influence
- Let's plan ahead – Proverbs 24.10
- Plan your funeral (all the details) – do it with a funeral home
- Follow-up with a funeral home
- Follow-up with your family and others who need to know
- Details about finances covered

Legacy - communicate with others – primarily your family – spouse, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren are important aspects of your life.

- Your story
- Your resources
- Your values
- Your legal issues: estate planning (wills, trusts, medical power of attorney, passwords for all computer related transactions, safety deposit keys, etc., etc.)
- Your faith
- All the details of the end (funeral directives, memorial service, advance payment)

- Your desires
- Your future - heaven

Barriers

- Denial – and not learning from the death experiences we have each learned/experienced thus far
- Underestimate our influence
- Self-consumed
- Our past – if not dealt with properly
- Family conflicts

Consider the following list in contemplating the end of our lives.

Legacy Issues – what legacy will I leave behind?

- Biblical passages that speak of transitions from generation to generation
 - Genesis 48, 49, 50 – Jacob & Joseph
 - Deuteronomy 31-34 - Moses
 - Joshua 24 - Joshua
 - David and Solomon – 1 Chronicles 28 & 29
 - Jesus and His disciples
 - Paul and Timothy – 2 Timothy

Think about how these biblical writers thought and planned for what they would say at the end of their lives? How does their example speak to you?

- Stories written down - Have you written the stories of your life?
 - General biography
 - Places lived
 - Jobs held
 - Failures – lessons learned
- People: Who are the people who have influenced you?
 - Immediate family lineage – ancestry.com
 - Extended family
 - Influential people in your life
 - Blessing your kids
- Values: What Values have been important to you? Will you pass them on? How?
 - What is important to you – your spouse – your marriage
 - What did your parents teach you
 - What did you teach your kids
 - What do you want your kids to teach your grandkids

- Legal Documents: have you taken care of all the legal documents that relate to the end of life one's life?
 - Wills
 - Trusts
 - Durable power of attorney – medical power of attorney – a living will – directives to physicians and your family, DNR in and out of the hospital
 - Passwords/details related to computer, bank and/or investment details – all the individuals associated with any or all the above
 - Kingdom investments – are they reflected in the above
 - Cash available for the immediate future – to help family or other details

- Funeral Concerns: Are your advanced funeral decisions/directives completed?
 - Burial details
 - Disposition of the body – traditional, cremation, body donation
 - Pre-planning, funeral directives, advance payment,
 - Memorial service details - type of memorial service
 - Selection of funeral products
 - Make them in advance – don't saddle your children with those details

- Pastoral: Conversations/Decisions with your spouse and your spiritual leaders
 - Conversations with your pastor
 - Memorial service details
 - Conversations with your family

- Physical: Are you taking care of your health?
 - Regular exercise - staying in shape as best you can
 - Decisions that prolong health
 - Anticipating and planning for physical hardships
 - Long term care

- Spiritual: How will you pass on your spiritual story? Have you written it down? Do your kids know your stories?
 - Your spiritual story – how has God led you
 - Your spiritual life
 - Milestones (Joshua)
 - People God used in your life
 - Preparing for heaven
 - Communicating with adult kids (grandkids - on appropriate level) in your family about heaven and all the above

The apostle Paul knew in advance his final days were fast approaching. What was he thinking? How was he planning?

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4.6-8).

Some may ask about our **fear of death**. Death is an event that is ahead for every person. Will we fear it when it comes for us? Will we be ready for it? How might we prepare for death and/or the fear of death emotionally and spiritually?

Here are a few suggestions.

Begin with these important Scriptures. Discuss the texts and think through them line by line or verse-by-verse as you read. What do these passages teach you about death, how to think about it, and life on the other side of death face-to-face with Jesus?

- Psalm 23.4
- 1 Corinthians 15
- John 11
- John 14.1-6
- John 17.20-26
- 2 Corinthians 5.1-10

Furthermore, consider the stories of many Old Testament saints who prepared for their own deaths and shared those experiences with their families. Study these passages and reflect on how they prepared for their death and how they communicated to those around them.

- Jacob - Genesis 48 & 49
- Joseph - Genesis 50
- Joshua – Joshua 24
- Jesus prepared the disciples – Acts 1.1-11
- Paul – 2 Timothy 4.6-8

Bring up the conversation. Most people don't like to go there, but death is real, and each of us ought to have a personal degree of comfort in thinking about, preparing for, and initiating conversations with our family and others about death, and specifically about our own death.

Consider the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34.1-12).

- Moses knew the time of his death, and he accepted what God appointed for him.
- Moses knew God face to face and he trusted Him – even in death.
- God kept His promise to him to show him the land.
- God personally buried him.
- Moses personally commissioned Joshua, his successor, before he died.

- He was still strong physically when he died.
- He served God faithfully his entire life.

We might also consider the death of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and how He faced His death (Hebrews 12.1,2). Like Moses, He trusted His life to His Father even in death. What did His death mean to Him? What does and will His death and resurrection mean to us?

Read some good books on death. One that has impacted me personally was written by my friend, Joseph Bayly, [A View from the Hearse](#). Joe was a personal mentor in my years with The Christian Medical Society, and my conversations with him about death were foundational and very significant. Now, here I am 35 years later thinking about his influence in my life about this subject.

In conclusion....

Assignment: Would you take a moment and write your own personal mission statement and thoughts about planning ahead for your own death as well as taking in all the consideration of those around you when you will not be here? How will you keep planning ahead?

An important question: How does Satan work to keep us from PLANNING AHEAD for when we will be gone?

Postscript on Planning Ahead – Thinking about Heaven

“Departures are all alike; it is the landfall that crowns the voyage.” C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm

An essential part of one’s “Plan for the End” is the anticipation for heaven and eternal life with Christ. As one nears the end of life, thinking ahead is critically important. It’s just like taking a trip to a foreign country, which my wife and I have often done. In anticipation of that trip, we will spend lots of time discovering where we will be and making specific plans to see and experience as much as we can during the time of the trip we are about to take.

Robert Louis Stevenson has a quote I have always enjoyed; “There are no foreign lands; it is only the traveler that is foreign.”

While it is true that we have not yet traveled to heaven, it is true that much has been written in the Scriptures to draw us towards it. Therefore, I’d like to suggest at least two things we ought to do in anticipation of heaven – both for ourselves and/or with loved ones who may be closer to heaven than we are.

1. Think about and read the Scriptures regarding heaven. Talk about them. What insights might they give you about heaven? Dare to dream about heaven. It won’t be long until we’ll be there.

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23.6).*

*My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73.26).*

In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so I would have told you. For I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also (John 14.1-3).

*But just as it is written,
THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM (1 Corinthians 2.9)*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21.1-4).

While space here does not allow us to delve into essential Scriptures that speak of heaven and resurrection life, I'd encourage you to read through these important sections of Scripture that might spur on your thinking about heaven.

- All of Revelation 21 & 22.
- Revelation 1-5
- 1 Corinthians 15.1-58
- 2 Corinthians 5.1-10
- Colossians 3.1-4
- Philippians 3.20,21
- 1 Corinthians 13.12

Consider reading books on heaven and the other side of death.

Randy Alcorn, Heaven, Tyndale House Publishers, 2004

Randy Alcorn, 50 Days of Heaven: Reflections That Bring Eternity to Light, 2006

The Dawn of Heaven Breaks, Anticipating Eternity, Sharon James (EP books, 2016);

I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope, Douglas Taylor (Banner, 2016, outstanding personal testimony);

O Death Where Is Thy Sting, John Murray (Westminster Seminary Press, 2017).

Have healthy discussions regarding the truth of heaven. When is the last time you've had healthy discussions with your aging peers, your adult children, and/or younger generations around you about our eternal destination? Why don't we think about and/or talk about heaven more?

One final thought – what would Jesus say to us about heaven? What did He say about heaven when He was on earth?

Begin your own journal about what heaven might be like. Think about it. Anticipate it.

An important question: How does Satan work to keep us from PLANNING AHEAD regarding our thinking and our discussions about heaven?

Next Steps

So now that you've completed this study, what next? What are your "take-a-ways?" Consider these suggestions.

1. Keep growing, keep connecting, keep caring, keep investing, keep being available, and keep planning ahead. Make it a way of life to keep God's purposes in clear focus. Don't ever stop being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8.29).

Dr. J. I. Packer said it this way, **"Runners in a distance race... always try to keep something in reserve for a final sprint. And my contention is that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out. The final sprint, so I urge, should be a sprint indeed."**

We believe that these *6 Essentials* can be a springboard for incredible growth through your aging years and in your church.

2. Keep persuading others in your church to do the same. Make an impact with your peers and share with them the vision of all that God desires to do in our lives to finish well. Share this video series/workbook with them.
3. If you have insights or ways this discipleship project can be improved, send your thoughts/ideas to us. We want to make it better. How can we serve you further?

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4. Suscribe to the FWM Peloton newsletter – you will be encouraged and discover new insights to keep the *6 Essentials* in focus. Sign up on our website.
<http://www.finishingwellministries.org/>
5. Finally, if this study has proved helpful, would you invest financially in Finishing Well Ministries? While we want to make our resources available at little or no cost, we realize that it does cost, so we invite you to give to strengthen the work of FWM. Contribute online (<https://www.finishingwellministries.org/donate>) or send a gift to us at the above address.
6. Finally, please pray for FWM. Pray that God will use us (and other ministries focused on encouraging and mobilizing the aging generation of believers across our country) to be about the work God calls us to in our aging years. This is our time.

FWM is an ambitious initiative to change the narrative of aging people in the life of our churches and communities. We see the presence of aging followers of Christ as a growing convoy/peloton of saints purposing to make a greater difference for Christ throughout their aging years, leaving a legacy outliving themselves. That legacy will strengthen the work of Christ for generations to come.

About the Author

Hal was born ('49) in Hershey, PA where he grew up on a dairy farm. He trusted Christ at the age of 6. Through a series of God stories, God led him to Dallas Seminary in the fall of '73. While there, he met and in 1976 married his sweetheart, Vicki, who is a native Dallasite.

They have 3 grown children (Jennifer, Bethany, and Jonathan) and 6 grandchildren. Hal has served as a pastor for all their years together in three different Dallas-based ministries - First Baptist Church - Dallas, ('76-'80), The Christian Medical & Dental Associations ('80-'93), and Dallas Bible Church ('93-'15). In 2015, he launched Finishing Well Ministries, mobilizing retiring boomers and distinguished seniors as a powerful convoy/peloton for the kingdom of Christ (<http://www.finishingwellministries.org/>). He is a graduate of Taylor University ('71), Dallas Seminary (ThM '78), and Denver Seminary (DMin '88).

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