

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN OLD AGE

Physical growth for most people is completed by the age of twenty. There are instances when some growth spurts have occurred after this age, but these are the exception, not the rule. Other types of growth, however, can continue long after one becomes a young adult. Mental, emotional, and spiritual growth can continue well into old age. Such does not always happen. One writer put it in these words: “However, this pursuit of growth does not always last. As we grow older, our zeal to become bigger and better changes. Our tendency is to become more focused on where we have been than on where we are going, and our idea of success is measured more often by what we have than what we are continuing to become.” The following chart can help one assess whether he has ceased growing or is continuing to develop:

Lack of Growth

Satisfied

Stagnate

Discouraged

Reflection

Impossible

Backward Look

Rest

Continued Growth

Dissatisfied

Excitement

Encouraged

Goal-setting

Possibilities

Forward Look

Effort

For those over the age of fifty, we ask: “Can you put yourself in the growth category?” In some areas, it may be perfectly acceptable for one to cease growing. Spiritually, however, one should never cease the growth process. In the remainder of this article, we want to encourage those who are older to continue to mature in their spiritual lives.

First, let us assure you that spiritual growth is still possible in old age. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying: “*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*” (2 Cor. 4:16). Most of the time, the outer man has little bearing on the inner man. The outer man aches and hurts. The inner man, on the other hand, can still be sharp and active. Because the inner man is still strong, older individuals can continue to mature in Christ.

Second, the fact that one can continue to grow spiritually in old age should bring much excitement. An elderly gentleman once told this writer that he was often discouraged because he could no longer do many of the physical things he did in the past. This is not the case with spiritual growth. Those who are older can still read, study, outline, memorize, and meditate on the Word of God. Paul was an older man when imprisoned in Rome the second time. In his brief epistle to Timothy, he made this request: “*The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments*” (2 Tim. 4:13). This older Christian man still desired the things that contributed to his spiritual growth. In his Golden Years, he still labored within the books and parchments. Other activities could not be enjoyed, but Bible study was still an exciting part of his life.

Third, spiritual growth comes by desiring God's Word and applying it to one's life. Peter wrote: “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the*

word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Those who are older need to block off large segments of time wherein they devote themselves to God's Word. They need to eat abundant portions of the bread of life. They need to drink deeply from the fountain of living water. Once they are filled, they can then exercise their inner man in service to God. Again, it was Paul who admonished his readers to "*exercise thyself rather unto godliness*" (1 Tim. 4:7). When the physical body is limited in its movements, the spiritual man can still vigorously exercise. This exercise of godliness has benefits both now and in eternity (1 Tim. 4:8).

Fourth, spiritual growth in old age enables one to specialize and delve into those things that are difficult. Fortunately, most of the Bible is simple to understand. There are, however, some things that are deep and difficult. It was the apostle Peter who noted that some of the things that Paul wrote are "*hard to be understood*" (2 Pet. 3:16). An elderly individual can use his previous knowledge, wisdom, and experiences to come to a deeper understanding of God's Word. He can take some time and research the more difficult texts. What a blessing to be able to seek the deeper treasures of God's Word.

Fifth, the spiritual growth of the elderly brings benefits to themselves and to others. We have already seen that the exercise of godliness has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This growth can also benefit those who are younger. In Titus 2, Paul exhorts the "*aged women*" to be "*teachers of good things*" (Tit. 2:3). He continues in verses 4 and 5 with these words: "That they may teach the younger women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." The older have acquired knowledge, weathered hardships, fought the enemy, and experienced the ups and downs of life. Their words are golden nuggets of wisdom to the

young, unlearned, and inexperienced. Some youth greatly desire their wisdom. When the elderly offer it, the young drink from it deeply.

Old age is not the time to cease one's spiritual growth. As long as one's lungs can breathe and the mind can think, there can be growth. This writer has often heard the elderly use their age as an excuse for being spiritually stagnated. If this has happened to you, develop a new resolution to begin to grow again. If you are in old age or approaching it, we hope that you have been encouraged to grow in your twilight years.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 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. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 4:17-51).

- Victor M. Eskew

Are You A “Dissembler”?

Abraham Lincoln often told a story about a young man who murdered both of his parents, then entered a plea for leniency on grounds that he was an orphan. The judge was having none of that, and he used a word that was not familiar to the jury. The word “dissembler” was not the word they would have used, but it was exactly what they were thinking. A dissembler is *“one who conceals under a false appearance; to conceal the truth by pretense; to act hypocritically; to be a hypocrite.”*

No, the young man did not get what he wanted, but he got free room and board for a long time.

Well-known author Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the following about a person who was known to be a dissembler: “No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.” In the book of Acts, chapter five, we read of a couple that was guilty of this behavior, and their deeds led to their death. They had done one thing and claimed another, which is merely one of several ways by which a man or woman can be guilty of being a dissembler, a liar. Their fate was not to be a pleasant one (Rev. 21:8).

Unless this is a very unusual group, some of us are guilty of being “dissemblers.” No, I’m not accusing, but it is never a bad idea for Christians to search our hearts for honest answers and make genuine corrections to such issues. Without “beating around the bush” on this subject, here is the clearest synonym for a dissembler: A dissembler is just a hypocrite! It may surprise you, but being a hypocrite is commonly said to be the most prevalent, the most practiced, the most transparent and most visible of sins. A hypocrite is someone who is one kind of person but who acts as if he/she is really another kind of person—much like an actor. In truth, the theater is where the word had its origin.

W. E. Vine gives a history of the Greek word *hupocrites* or hypocrite: It was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in large masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice; hence the word came to be used metaphorically of a dissembler, a hypocrite. (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* 242)

An actor on the stage or the screen, in truth being one person, is acting the part of another. The Greeks made good use of the word, and we can see the obvious application of the term.

Who, then, is a hypocrite? The word is found only in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark and Luke). Therein the term is found twenty times, and the only person quoted in those passages is Jesus Himself. He uses it to define the "*scribes and the Pharisees,*" and it is used in a very special, forceful way on each occasion. In Mark 7:6 Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and scribes boldly and powerfully: "*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*" Those to whom Jesus spoke were thought to be the best and most righteous of men. That is how they appeared to others, but Jesus said they were truly hypocrites. That thought should be sobering to all of us. It is so easy to pretend godliness, to act as though we are genuine followers of Christ. But He knows our hearts. He knows who and what we really are.

When we sing "*O How I Love Jesus,*" or "*Jesus Is All the World To Me,*" Jesus knows if we are just mouthing the words but really thinking of other things. If He called a group of Jewish leaders "hypocrites," do you not think He would call us "dissemblers" or hypocrites, too? In our giving, in our prayers, and in our everyday interaction with our neighbors, Jesus knows our hearts. We may fool our neighbors—even our family—but we won't fool Jesus.

I wish I had not written this article; doing so demands that I look more carefully at my own actions and thoughts. How easy it is to think we can fool God. How easy it is for us to merely go through the motions without feeling, without genuine, heartfelt thoughts in our worship, in our daily lives. In Revelation 3:15-16, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write to the church at Laodicea: "*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I could wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.*"

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matt. 7:5)

- Carl B. Garner

Why Invite People to Church?

Though 85 percent of Americans call themselves Christians, only 69 percent regard themselves as church members. Only 43 percent will attend church on a given Sunday. Another 22 percent will attend occasionally. Only 22 percent of Americans attend Bible classes on Sunday mornings. There are now 79 million “unchurched” people in America.

Many of these people are “notional” Christians. They claim to be Christians but do not practice their Christianity by church attendance. These are people who need a church home. Why do they need a church home? For the same reasons you do.

- They need the spiritual help and climate going to church provides.
- They need to hear the Scripture preached and to remember the Lord's death in His Supper.
- They need to praise the Lord in song and to pray about their needs.
- They need the Lord's help and teaching from week to week.

They also need a church home, because we all need our brothers and sisters in Christ. Life has a way of handing us surprises. It means so

much to have the support of loving brothers and sisters who will pray with us and for us when we need them.

Solomon was right when he said that “*two are better than one*” (Eccl. 4:9). There is strength in numbers, and brothers and sisters assure our hearts when they walk beside us in serving the Lord. “*Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*” (Prov. 27:17).

Surely you know someone who needs a church home. Won't you help them? Bring them to the Lord.

- Phil Sanders

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: “*Traveling Down Some Bible Roads!*” (text: Isa. 35:8-10); Sunday evening: “*EZRA: Returning From Captivity!*”