AGING IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

LESSON 1

Gaining a handle on the reality of growing older—a theological framework

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Old Testament has 250 passages on aspects of aging.
The approach is phenomenological

- The information is woven into the fabric of the story of redemption

Unlike

- The scientific or research approach of gathering data and then suggesting a hypothesis to explain the data.

Example: Sarah’s inability to conceive teaches something about ageing and the ability to conceive.
Life in Bible is a continuum

- Life begins conception and proceeds to death

- So, age or aging in the OT is not about a transition from youth to death, or the first phase of death, but rather aging belongs to life
A primary goal of aging is the acquisition of wisdom

- Piaget came close to grasping the OT perspective when he taught:
- “The assimilation of events and changing circumstances into one’s self-perception is a proper view of ageing”
- Such adjusting is a good partial perspective of OT wisdom.
Goal continued

- The believer should be in process throughout life:
  - Seeing himself as a child of God & assimilating life-changes that God brings (2 Peter 3:18)
  - Make choices in response to changes that honor God (Ps 92:15)

- In times of expanding or receding abilities—a major mark of wisdom is making choices that honor God
  - Note following diagram
Aging: Major Mark of Wisdom

- Abilities expand / abilities diminish

- In either case, make choices that honor God

- **Temperate**—level-headed. “What is in view is the unequivocal and immediately self-evident antithesis to all kinds of mental fuzziness” (Adams, *Wrinkled by Not Ruined*)

- **Dignified**—serious. Comes from the word for reverence (fear or worship). Aging men should evidence a manner of life that reflects their worshipfulness towards God in all of life (personal and corporate).
- **Self-restrained** — leaves no room for mid-life crisis!
- **Healthy faith** — should be seen as one who walks consistently by faith
- **Healthy love** — should be seen as one who practices love towards all
- **Healthy endurance** — should be seen as one who can patiently walk through difficult times.

**Conclusion:** One who has aged biblically then is one who has acquired wisdom. These NT characteristics are a good equivalency of OT wisdom.
Secular perspective is useful

- Tells how the natural man responds to his environment
- Tells how the natural man responds to society
- Tells how the body changes in aging process
- Analyses of how the above answers impact society and public policy
  - Careful tracking produces accumulated facts
    - But the question is interpretation and
    - The ethical prescriptive in use of info
Comparison: secular & biblical

- Research questions are horizontal, i.e. are only anthropological. No theological or spiritual dimension
World View

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- Event  Relationship  Event

- God

- Event  Relationship  Event
Contrast Biblical View with Secular Theory--Example

- **Disengagement:** the mutual withdrawal of the person and society from each other.

- **Activity:** the person who ages optimally manages to stay active and resist the shrinkage of his or her social world.

- **Role Exit:** old age is a time when a number of roles are terminated—the cessation of a stable pattern of social interaction. (Carig, *Human Development*)
Towards a theology of aging: how to think about our aging

- Older adults are blessed with resources to be invested in the Kingdom (Ps. 71:15-18)
- Older adults have the opportunity for great fruitfulness (Ps. 92:12-15)
- Older adults have the opportunity to be examples and provide wisdom to younger believers (Titus 2:3-4)
- Older adults are responsible to use their spiritual gifts in the body (I Cor. 12)
Older adults, as part of the body of Christ and citizens of the Kingdom, should play a critical role in the church (I Tim 3; Titus 1)

Older adults are image bearers of God, therefore retain dignity even if the mind and body fail (Gen 1:26)

Older adults are worthy of honor and respect (Eph. 6:4)

Older adults are fertile ground for evangelism (Acts 1:8)
Old age is a time for fruitfulness Psalm 92

- A converted heart is a thankful heart 1-4, 10
- A converted heart is a discerning heart 5-9
- A converted heart is a well-aging heart 11-15
  - Understands the challenges 11
  - Understands that he/she will grow 12-13a
  - Understands that he/she is to be productive 13b-14
  - Understands that proclamation is his/her purpose 15
Why is a theology of aging important?

- It impacts our self-perception
- It impacts our perception of others
- It impacts our perspective on relationships
- It impacts our perspective on end of life issues
- It impacts our view of death and dying
LESSON II

Six Critical Issues
Six Critical Issues often Faced in Running the Final Lap

1. Personal Failures—Leaving Yesterday Behind
   - Parenting: the Prodigal Child and accompanying guilt
   - Inability to provide for self-care
   - Regrets over a broken family (Ps. 37:8; II Sam 18:27-33)
2. Career Failures— *The God You Can Know* by Dan Dehaan

- *Did not achieve goals*—leads to depression
- *Forced to take early retirement*—leads to depression
- *Minimal estate to pass on*—leads to depression
3. Self-Perception Adjustment- *Bible study on Who Am I in Christ?* By Howard Eyrich. Grasping who I am in Christ provides the security of being valuable and the confidence of a God-given mission. One gerontologist defined retirement simultaneously as:

- A process- separation from one’s life style and job
- An event- informal rite of passage which signifies the end of employment and loss of social status
- A role exchange-from being somebody who earns one’s way to somebody with the right to have an income without working and the autonomy of time management
- I would add, the possibility of focused opportunity to serve the Kingdom
4. Family Conflicts— *Peacemaker for the Family* by Ken Sande.

- Conflicts over distribution of estate
- Conflicts over who will care for the parent
- Conversations that allow the family to plan for care and distribution of estate
  - open
  - honest
5. Living Arrangement— *The Art Aging* by Howard Eyrich

- Will I be able to live on my own? No one knows the answer. Alternatives need to be considered in advance.
- I’m going to live with him/her? (Which child? How long each child? With a sibling?)
- Do I have to go to a nursing home? Retirement Living facility? Research community
- How to make the nursing home decision (Institutionalization—See *The Art of Aging*)

- **Biblical Principles:** James 1:27; I Tim 5:3; Deut 27:19; Ps 68:5; Ps 147:3; Mal 3:5;
6. Am I ready to die? E.E. Questions 1 & 2 need to be raised. [Next Slide]

- Am I ready to face the next life? Judgment or welcome?
- Who will evangelize my parent? Everyone who has opportunity. God converts!
- Can the elderly really change and come to Christ?
  - Yes, the case of a ninety-two year old mother-in-law
  - Yes, the case of a retired seventy year old Fire Chief
**EE Diagnostic Questions**

- **Question 1** - Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven or is that something you would say you're still working on? (1 John 5:13) "These things I have written ...”

- **Question 2** - Suppose you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" what would you say? (John 14:5-7)
How to prepare for These tough questions—four injunctions

- Have Christ’s mind- “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Phil. 2:1-3, 5
Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Phil. 2:14
- Forget the past Phil. 3:13

- Regrets
- Hurts
- Embarrassment
Press toward the goal of the upward call Phil. 3:14-21
- Abraham
- Heb 9:11
- Jesus
- Heb 12:2
- Goal
- II Cor 5:1
Reasons for Elder Care and Implications

LESSON III
Two Leading Reasons for Elder Care

- Physical incapacitation
- Mental incapacitation
  - Dementia
  - Alzheimer’s Disease
Depression

- Depression will be part of your experience
  - Diminished capacity for **recognition** they know they are losing it
  - Death **expectation** fear of dying
  - **Dangers** inherent for the caregiver
    - Fear of **self-harm or violence**
    - Depression **of the caregiver** --overwhelmed
    - Anxiety **over ability to do what is necessary**
    - Resentment **towards loved one or God**
Gaining Perspective

- **Doctrine** is essential: Is God sovereign?
- **Humor** is essential: A sense of the ridiculous
- **Not taking yourself to seriously** is essential [avoiding a “poor me syndrome”]
  - Rejoicing in the Lord
  - In all things give thanks
- **Accepting role reversal** is essential: You become the parent; your parent becomes the child.
Personal Physical Care Is Important

- Physical fitness—of parent and caregiver
- Balanced diet— for the parent and caregiver
- Adequate rest— for the caregiver (sleep patterns for the parent are usually very erratic.)
Personal Balance Is Important

- Prepare yourself for the **inevitable**
  - Learn to think biblically
    - God is in control
    - Decide you will engage with God’s purposes
  - Learn to think realistically
    - Probability is not assurability
    - Caring for parent “rubs your nose in it daily”
- Take time to laugh—read an Erma Brombeck book periodically
Develop new hobbies

If your hobby is horseback riding, you may have to develop painting or some other in-home hobby. But, develop something for you to have an outlet.

For my wife, it was the neighborhood teenagers
For me, my work diverted my attention to others
For us, it was our family—we played together!

Embrace music—it keeps the tenor of the home mellow
- Maintain **Bible** studies, supper clubs, etc.
- Maintain personal **Bible study**, church attendance
- Connect to a support group—community is a theme of Scripture
- Beware of **guilt**
  - Over attitudes
  - Over behavioral incidents
  - Over decision to go with Assisted Living or Nursing Home
  - Over wishing your parent would die
    - Remember I John 1:9 and the Psalms
  - If **anger, resentment, anxiety, depression** is your experience seek help
Worship and Church Connection

- Remember this is the **God Designed** source of support Acts 6
- Connect your loved one to the **church**
  - (Tuesday Fours)
Some Suggested Readings

- My Journey through Alzheimer's Disease by Robert Davis
- Living Your Best with Early Stage Alzheimer’s: An Essential Guide by Lisa Snyder
- Creating Moments of Joy: A Journal for Caregivers (fourth edition) by Jolene Brackey
Closing Thoughts from Proverbs

- Like an open city with no defenses is the man with no check on his feelings
- Answer the fool according to his folly, less you too become like him
- A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger
- A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a sharp one crushes the spirit
- He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man (person) of understanding.

- A brother (or sister) offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.

- Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it (power of the tongue) will eat its fruit. [25:28, 26:4, 15:1, 17:27, 18:19, 18:21 and 17:9.]
LESSON IV

Preventing the NEGATIVE Cycle

ASSESSING WHEN TO BECOME THE PARENT
Assessing IF and WHEN You Become the Parent Parent

- When you observe the fearfulness of illness coupled with a diminishing functional ability becoming the dominate theme of life
- When recommended by the doctor
- When you observe the following issues to the point of interdicting normal functioning
  - Depression—self-depreciating comments coupled with diminishing ability to be productive
- Helplessness that becomes aggression
- Self-pity—conversational theme becomes one of “poor me”
- Intensifying of resentment because you/family are not at their beck and call—develops antisocial behavior (Example: a bitter spirit begins to develop in a parent for whom this has not been characteristic)
- Fear being put in nursing home drives a defensiveness to the point of being unreasonable
- Diminishing ability to be rational, reasonable, and respectful
- Loss of the ability to drive, to walk, to care for the necessary functions of living
Check List—When to Make the Move for in Home Assistance or to Nursing Home

- You may want to create a check list of these symptoms. When you reach 5 out of 8 it would be time to make a move.
Preventing the Negative Cycle

- Illustration—My Mom and hurts—and Lord
- Illustration—the Glad Bag—a practical means of putting off, changing mind, putting on Eph 4:22-24
- Creating a haven of dignity—words/actions
  - Prevent the critical assault trap Eph 4:29
  - It is the way you say it, not just what you say.... Eph 4:15
- Practice Protocols of Christian Relationships
  - NEXT SLIDE
Protocols for Christian Relationships

- Love
- Encourage
- Accept
- Confront
- Serve
- Forbear
- Speak truth
- Forgive
- Comfort
- Be Kindly affectionate
- In honor prefer
- Submit in fear of God

- Consume not
- Provoke not
- Lie not
- Speak evil not
- Hold not grudges

These protocols are the spokes of a relationship wheel that runs smoothly and gives God glory.
Five Rules for the Child Who Is Parenting the Parent

- Control your tongue (James 3)
- Give five times as much encouragement as criticism (Remember the Protocols)
- Be slow to anger (James 1:19; Is 40:41, Eph 4:26-27)
- Consider their feelings (Eph 4:32) [honor them and be kindly affectionate]
- Rejoice in the LORD
Bottom Line!!!!

- Intentional Christian living is essential in the process of parenting our parents.