



Growing Old



Problems Christians Face

Growing Old

**Learning from Characters
in the Bible**

by

Jonathan Hughes

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Contents

Chapter 1 Growing Old - Introduction	Page 5
Chapter 2 The Patriarchs	Page 9
Chapter 3 Moses, Joshua and Caleb	Page 17
Chapter 4 Solomon	Page 25
Chapter 5 Hezekiah	Page 33
Chapter 6 Simeon and Anna	Page 40
Chapter 7 Paul	Page 48
Conclusion	Page 54

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Chapter 1

Growing Old - Introduction

“No one longs to live more than someone growing old.”

Sophocles

The fear of what is to come is the inspiration for so many to maintain the status quo and carry on living. And yet it is hardly an inspiring thought!

***“Grow old 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 planted, youth shows but half.’
Trust God, see all, nor be afraid.”***

Robert Browning

The English author presents a far more positive view of growing old although his faith was sometimes open to question.

***“When granted many years of life, growing old in age is natural,
but growing old with grace is a choice. Growing older with grace
is possible for all who set their hearts and minds on the Giver of
grace, the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Billy Graham

Here we get a Christian view on growing old and it opens to us the possibility of this being an active, profitable development of our relationship with the One who gives life to all mankind. So often we spend so much of our lives wishing we were at a different stage in our lives. As we get older, it seems, nothing much changes. So much money and effort is spent in trying to

look younger and avoid the natural consequences of advancing years. We fight against the reality of our mortality and yet celebrate longevity. But for those of us who are still alive, we all grow older at the same rate: one day at a time.

We fight against the reality of our mortality and yet celebrate longevity.

The apostle Paul wrote some challenging words in his letter to the Christians in Philippi, the place where the Gospel first arrived in mainland Europe. It was also a town to which many who had served their time in the Roman army retired after they were released from service.

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”

(Philippians 1:21-24)

What a challenge to us today as we look forward to our future – whatever age we are! Do we view death as the better option for our lives? Paul’s statement is not in some depressive, escapist way that so much of the current euthanasia debate revolves around. He had more than his fair share of physical disabilities, as he makes clear in 2 Corinthians 4:16:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”

What an exciting prospect we have to look forward to – inward renewal, fresh for each morning, that brings with it the opportunity for fruitful labour! No mention here of aches and pains, the problems of living on a fixed income, failing memory and the shortcomings of the present generation. But Paul, like Billy Graham, highlights to us an absolutely vital aspect of growing old that perhaps we do not realise. We cannot generally

choose the circumstances of life, good or bad, but we can all choose how we respond to them. Is it with joy that the Lord has given us fresh opportunity to serve Him or is it with moaning and complaint at numerous perceived ills?

Hopefully, as we work through this course we will learn how to be ‘more fruitful’ in our advancing years. We will look at some powerful examples of those in the Bible who grew old well. We will also learn the warnings from those who failed to grow old well. There is always something we can do for God! The Psalmist prayed:

There is always something we can do for God!

“Now also when I am old and grey headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.” (Psalm 71:18)

Who is better placed to speak with authority of the keeping power of God, than someone well advanced in years? This is a lesson that we need to start to learn while we are still young!

Moses was perhaps the greatest of God’s servants in the Old Testament. In the heading to Psalm 90, he is described as a man of God, and he lived until he was 120 years old. But he gives us clear warning in this Psalm, verses 10 - 12:

“The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

...we must all give account of our lives to God.

Moses understood that we must all give account of our lives to God. It will not be the time we spent at the golf course, or

where to buy the best coffee and cake that interest Him! - not that there is anything inherently wrong with these things, per se, but they will hardly test the God who gives us the most wonderful promise in Isaiah :

“Even to your old age I am He, and even to grey hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you.” (Isaiah 46:4)

As we will see in our six chapters, men and women proved the reality of this promise for themselves. We might all know it to be true in theory, but only those whose lives are wholly committed to Him, from the cradle to the grave, will know the reality of this promise in practice. We have a wonderful God! Now may our lives prove this to our generation, and to the generations to come!

*We have a wonderful
God! Now may our
lives prove this to our
generation, ...*

Chapter 2

The Patriarchs

Hebrews 11:5 - 21.

In this chapter we consider three great men of faith who lived a very long time ago. Their lives take up a substantial part of the book of Genesis, but they are also mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. This particular chapter has been described as a great 'art gallery of faith' because in it we have word portraits that describe amazing examples of faith for us to follow. Firstly we look at Enoch and learn about our walk with God. Then we will look at Abraham and how to wait for God's timing. Lastly, we see Jacob, a man who was worshipping at the very end of his life.

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Walking with God

We know very little about Enoch's life. He was born six generations on from Adam, and that is the last ordinary thing we know about him. He lived on earth for 365 years and for most of that time he **walked with God** - a walk that was pleasing to God. In fact, it was so pleasing that at the age of 365 God took him to Heaven, without him experiencing death - his earthly remains could not be found. It might seem like Enoch was alive for a very long time, and in one sense he was. However, his grandpa lived until he was 895 years old and his father until he was 962. Enoch's son, Methuselah, has the distinction of being the oldest man in history, dying at the age of 969! Alongside these, Enoch was a spring chicken! And yet I do not think for a minute that Enoch would regret the fact that God took him at

such a ‘young’ age. All those plans and things still left on the bucket list were as nothing when compared to the ‘incomparable glory’ of being **with** God.

As we have already read, Paul described this as being ‘far better’. I do not think this was because of the aches and pains he felt each morning as he got up. I do not think it was because of

...compared with the very best that this life has to offer, the prospect of being with Christ was ‘far better’.

his supposed eyesight problems or any other of the daily problems that beset us as we grow old. No, compared with the very best that this life has to offer, the prospect of being with Christ was ‘far better’. This is a real challenge to us

in our modern world. We can be so busy trying to cram so much into our lives and achieve so many different things, that ‘Heaven will just have to wait until I have done all I want to do in this world’. But when we think like this, we are completely missing out on the best that this life has to offer, which is the anticipation of Glory and preparing ourselves to be with Him.

Enoch’s manner of life made him stand out amongst his contemporaries. When the Bible talks about a person’s ‘walk’, it is referring to their whole manner of life. Enoch did not just do the right thing now and again, or do something dramatic and wonderful as a one-off. His whole life was spent in close communion with God. There is a lovely verse in Isaiah:

“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

Perhaps there have been times in your life (that you can look back on) when God has very particularly worked in, or through, you and He has seemed very close. You felt as though you have soared like an eagle. At other times there has been a particular

and specific service that you have been called to - a week at camp, an evangelistic campaign - and you have served well and really known the enabling strength of the Lord. You have run and not grown weary!

...the greatest test for the believer is to walk day in day out, ... through the ordinariness of life and to keep doing so in a way that brings honour to God.

However, the greatest test for the believer is to walk day in day out, year after year, through the ordinariness of life and to keep doing so in a way that brings honour to God. What a wonderful God we have Who can keep us from fainting during this journey of a lifetime. I do not know if Enoch ever did anything spectacular - we are not told. I do know that his habitual life was pleasing to God, so pleasing in fact that we read:

“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” (Genesis 5:24 NIV)

I can almost picture Enoch and God setting out one day, and towards dusk God turning to Enoch and saying, “Well it’s a long way back to your tent. Why not just take a few more steps and you will be with Me in My home.”

The Bible says that one day we who are children of God

“...shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

For some of us, the change that will take place in us when we get to Heaven will be enormous. Others, who have spent a lifetime becoming more and more like their Saviour, will hardly notice it. Perhaps you have had that experience when meeting friends you have not seen for a long time. Some have changed beyond recognition, others hardly at all; it is as if it were only yesterday that you last saw them. I wonder how great a change will occur in me on the day God takes me home?

Waiting for God

Abraham lived to be 175 years old. His life had been full of ups and downs. There had been the call to leave home and go to inherit a land that God would give him. As a young man he had eagerly obeyed. There were also times when his faith had faltered. In Egypt, he had nearly caused ruin to those around him as he depended on his own strength to survive. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the sea shore. And yet, now full of years, he still had no heir. Could God have forgotten His promise? Had Abraham's failures caused God to rewrite His plans? Neither of these things was true but Abraham would learn that God's timing is always perfect. As year after year passed by, Abraham grew desperate so he had a child with his wife's maid in an attempt to achieve all that God had promised. But this was not the child that God had promised.

Abraham would learn that God's timing is always perfect.

As a result of his actions, a son was born to Abraham and Hagar, and he was called Ishmael. Far from bringing peace to the family, there was now tension between Abraham's wife, Sarai, and her maid Hagar. There would also be enmity between Ishmael and the son that God had promised – Isaac. Many scholars have suggested that some of the Arab nations can trace their ancestry back to Ishmael, and there is still today an open hostility between some Arab nations and Israel – the descendants of Isaac. There was undoubtedly forgiveness for Abraham's impetuous actions but the consequences have lasted for thousands of years.

We need to learn to wait.

Too often, we may be challenged to act when God would have us wait. As our time grows short and our strength begins to fail, the temptation to do things in a way that seems best to us increases. We need to learn to wait. Abraham's family life would have been a

lot better had he learned that lesson in time. Waiting is not laziness! Waiting looks for the light so you can move on. Laziness is quite content to remain in the dark so that it cannot be seen. The simple words describing Sarah: **“...she judged Him faithful who had promised.”** (Hebrews 11:11) give us the clue to learning to wait for God to act.

Perhaps you can picture a newborn wildebeest on the African plain. Moments after birth, it attempts to stand but it wobbles and totters and falls back down. However, within a few minutes it has found its legs and is soon running with the herd because it has found that its legs were faithful in supporting its weight. One of the great advantages in growing older is that we have so much more opportunity to know from experience the keeping power of God and His great faithfulness. Through all the many events of life He has been there and sustained us. His promise to **“never leave us, nor forsake us”** is one that He has always kept. That is a valuable lesson that we can pass on to others!

At the end of Abraham’s life, in Genesis chapter 25, we read

“And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living, he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.” (Genesis 25:5,6)

From this we to learn the lesson that it is right to make proper provision for the time after our death. None of us likes to think about our own mortality but we should not evade our responsibilities by burying our head in the sand. Particularly if we have young children, their spiritual care should be a prime motive in having a will drawn up and their care outlined clearly. Before the Lord we need to consider what we will do with our estate, so that it can go on working for us even after we have died. Isaac was the child

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of promise and so it was right that all Abraham had was left to him. But Abraham also ensured that Isaac was not left with a whole host of hostile half-brothers to have to deal with. He had sent these away to the east so that Isaac could enjoy his inheritance without distraction. It is a good thing if our spiritual children can enjoy their spiritual inheritance because of the actions we have taken. We return to the subject of our inheritance in a later chapter.

Worshipping God

Jacob's life had been anything but routine. He had been a deceiver, tricking his father into giving him the family blessing which belonged to his older brother. This had caused him to run away from home. He had wrestled with God, bargaining with Him to try to secure divine help that God was more than ready to give. He had returned to his family to make peace only to find that his beloved mother had died in his absence. He had had many children, some of whom had attempted to murder one of their own brothers. What an eventful, calamitous life! However, at the end of it all we read in Hebrews 11:21,

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

There are two things to learn here. Firstly, that Jacob's ear was open to the voice of God right at the end of his life.

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Joseph had two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. By tradition, the family blessing would go to the older of the two - Manasseh. Joseph brought his boys to Jacob to receive that blessing and Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh. Joseph was cross and no doubt thought his father was getting a bit confused in his old age. But Jacob knew what he was doing for God had revealed to him that it was through Ephraim that the family line would be particularly blessed. We

talk about a lifelong learning process, but sometimes we think we know as much as we shall ever know; we have read a particular verse many times, and read all the commentaries that are worth reading. The temptation to become a bit “crusty”, not expecting God to give us a fresh insight into a particular part of His word, or a deeper understanding of His person, is strong. Perhaps we may even believe it is true and stop listening to others, or more seriously to God. But Jacob did not fall into this trap and here, at the end of his life, still had the spiritual perception to do what God wanted – even though it involved change!

Jacob ... at the end of his life, still had the spiritual perception to do what God wanted – even though it involved change!

Secondly, we see him worshipping at the end of his life. His appreciation of his God’s worth had increased over the course of his life. This is the way it should be and yet, if I am honest, I can look back to the young man that I was and wish for the commitment I had then. I have become comfortable, reasonable and altogether too settled. God, on the other hand, would have us learn afresh each day the glories of His person and work. Every day should be a learning experience of His grace causing us to worship Him. Perhaps I have become a bit mentally sluggish, not really looking at or thinking about the way in which God is working, and in so doing, miss out on the opportunity to worship Him. Naturally speaking, the same thing happens at Christmas! I remember as a child the excitement and getting up early so that I could open my presents. Now, I prefer a bit of a lie in and the presents can definitely wait ‘til after breakfast! This may be normal, and matters little in the natural sphere of things. But it is deadly if I have really become like this spiritually. Jacob did not use his frailty as an excuse either. He was **‘leaning**

His appreciation of his God’s worth had increased over the course of his life.

on his staff', perhaps unable to walk unaided. But, he did not let his physical frailties stop him from doing the right thing. It has been said that 'in Christian service it is better to wear out, than rust out!' It would be a wonderful thing if we could be encouraged by the example of Jacob and remain as active as we can in spiritual things. It is not easy returning from an evening meeting to a dark and empty house in the middle of winter, and

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going out to church twice on a Sunday can be exhausting, but we do need to set the right example to the next generation, and the ones after that. At any time in life, we can find reasons not to go to church and to take things more easily but we need to find the spiritual energy to put to death the old man and 'do what we can' for the Lord. And for those who are truly 'housebound', the example Jacob gives is to remain a worshipper right to the very end.

So as we finish our look at the patriarchs' lives, let us refresh our memories. Enoch is a wonderful example to us of walking with God. Our day by day life needs to be such that we do everything in the company of God. Abraham teaches us that we need to learn to wait for God's timing. It is always perfect and patience is the right expression of our faith as we expect God to act at any moment but realise that it may not be yet, or even in our lifetime! Jacob teaches us that there should be a growing appreciation of God's greatness throughout the whole course of our lives. We are never too old to gain a fresh appreciation of the Lord Jesus. Jacob would also encourage us to continue despite physical frailty, for sometimes with the perishing of the outward form, the inward reality is seen more beautifully.

Introduction & The Patriarchs

EXAM 1

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. What Christian quality did Billy Graham link with growing old?
 - a. Patience
 - b. Love
 - c. Grace
2. How old was Enoch's grandpa when he died?
 - a. 969
 - b. 895
 - c. 365
3. Abraham protected Isaac's inheritance by
 - a. sending his other sons far away
 - b. treating all of his children exactly the same
 - c. ensuring that his fighting men were sworn to Isaac _
4. Jacob showed that he was still listening to God by
 - a. putting his right hand on the head of Manasseh
 - b. putting his right hand on the head of Ephraim
 - c. blessing his youngest son more than his other sons
5. At the end of his life, what do we see Jacob doing as he leaned on his staff?
 - a. Having a quiet nap
 - b. Offering the younger generation some inspirational anecdotes
 - c. Worshipping God

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. The prophet Isaiah gives us the promise that God will carry us even in our old age.
7. Enoch died when he was 365 years old.
8. The fact that Abraham did not wait for God to provide an heir still has consequences today.
9. Waiting for God involves an active looking for His light.
10. Jacob's frailty as an old man prevented his useful service.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In what ways can older people show the reality of God to the next generation?

Chapter 3

Moses, Joshua and Caleb

In this chapter we consider the lives of these three men under the headings of the challenge, the choice and the continuing. The lessons we learn are valid for all believers of any age but are particularly so for those who are older, as the events we shall consider happened to these three men of God when they were old men.

Moses – the challenge (Deuteronomy 34) For the first 40 years of his life Moses had been a prince in Egypt, receiving the very best that the greatest power in the world had to offer.

Moses had been a prince in Egypt,

He was at the centre of learning, commerce and military might. Under such circumstances, he might have been forgiven for thinking that he was everything. But then in Exodus chapter 2 we read that Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster in the defence of a fellow Israelite and had to flee from Pharaoh and from Egypt. He escaped to the far side of the Midian desert and, for the next 40 years, became a shepherd for Jethro his father-in-law. Life

... Moses ... realised that he was nothing.

would have been spartan and lonely and Moses would have realised that he was nothing. But then God appeared to him and he was commissioned to go back to Egypt with the message that Pharaoh had to release the Israelites from slavery.

For the final 40 years of his life, Moses would lead the rebellious Israelites through the wilderness to the brink of the Promised

Land. During that time he would know that God was everything!

*... he would know that
God was everything!*

We now read about Moses at the very end of his life in Deuteronomy 34. He was 120 years old, and had spent the last 40 years bearing the burden of responsibility in caring for God's people. There had been no thought of retiring in his mind although, as we shall see, Moses had made proper provision for handing over the responsibility of leading the people.

The chapter starts by telling us that Moses climbed Mount Nebo which was nearly 9000 high, just a little lower than Scafell Pike! However, this was a climb with a purpose, not just an afternoon off. From the summit of Nebo, Moses could see much of the land that God was going to give the people of Israel, right across to the Mediterranean Sea. It truly was a wonderful inheritance for the people – a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. But Moses was never going to enter that land! What might have been a crushing blow to other lesser men did not deter Moses from maintaining a desire to see what God had in store for His people. Moses had a big heart that went beyond the limitations of what was strictly relevant to his own circumstances. This is increasingly important as one of the dangers of growing old is that our horizons tend to shrink. With decreasing mobility and energy to travel, we become less inclined to be concerned with what lies beyond our immediate circumstances, whether in terms of geography or generation.

So the first lesson to learn in this chapter is that of maintaining a large vision for God's work and His people. We may not be called to undertake strenuous mountain climbing well into old age but it is vital that we maintain a real and knowledgeable interest not only in what God is doing in the immediate

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circumstances of our lives, but also in the wider Christian community and particularly amongst the young. Moses would never live in the land which God was going to give to the Israelites but he still maintained an interest in that land. We may not see those who are very young mature into spiritual adults but we should still have an interest in their spiritual welfare. It is vital that we make the atmosphere within our homes and churches one which positively encourages children. Sadly, sometimes, the opposite is true and they are expected to sit perfectly still and make no noise during a service. We become focused on having a nice time for ourselves with little thought for

... we need to make sure that we maintain an interest in the lives of the next generations.

the wellbeing of others. In these days of easy communication it has never been easier for us to keep in touch. However we do so, we need to make sure that we maintain an interest in the lives of the next generations - what they are doing at school, college or work. We

should make an effort to learn some of the modern hymns they like to sing and support them when they want to take on some form of spiritual responsibility.

Although with increasing age we might not be able to be directly involved with activities in which we were once active supporters we can, nevertheless, still keep up to date via newsletters and missionary reports etc and pray intelligently. We are also far more likely now to be in a position to financially support these kinds of things. Our shoulders may be frail but we need to ensure that they remain broad!

By taking an interest in the Promised Land, Moses was sending a very important signal to those younger than himself. That message was one of hope for the future. Probably, other than Joshua and Caleb, the people had never known anything other than wandering in the desert. Was it ever going to end, or would it always be like this? We need to make sure that we do not send

the message that we have given up any hope of things improving in the church. Perhaps you can remember better times, but do you still pray and work and believe that better days will come? If not, then we can hardly be surprised if the next generation want no part of our Christian experience. After all, we bury corpses; we do not carry them around with us!

... proper provision needs to be made for the future.

The second lesson to learn from this chapter (Deut 34) is that a proper provision needs to be made for the future. From Hebrews chapter 3, we can probably say that Moses was the greatest servant of God in the Old Testament. When he died, how were the Israelites ever going to be able to replace him? And yet with a minimum of fuss, verse 9 records that Joshua was ready and prepared to take over the work. Moses, knowing that he was not going to be around forever, had made proper provision for just such a day. For forty years he had been responsible for the people and led them faithfully. No doubt, he had very much fashioned the role to suit his character. The danger of falling into the trap of thinking that he was indispensable must have been great. But the greatness of his position is seen in that he had actively prepared someone else to do the job. The challenge for us is to do likewise!

Particularly, if God has used us to start a work for Him, we may be tempted to believe it is **our** work and become very protective of it. We may even think that nobody else could possibly do the job. Then when we are unable to continue it fails because there has been no succession planning. The key to doing a great work for God is to ensure that others are trained to do it. I can remember in my secular working life being nervous about doing certain jobs. I knew they had to be done, but because someone else had always done them, I remained reluctant to do

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so. When I was forced to take those jobs on, I soon realised that I was quite capable and all that worry had been for nothing. It is a good thing if we can show and teach others how to get involved whilst we are still able to do so. All those years of experience can then be handed on and will no doubt prove invaluable. But we need to be ready to take a step back and understand that others may do the job in a different way. Joshua was not the leader that Moses was.

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Joshua – the choice (Joshua 24)

Joshua was a young man when he left Egypt and had served Moses from his youth. For forty years he had been compelled to wander in the wilderness, enduring the corporate punishment of God, although he and Caleb had not been the cause of Israel's failure. Upon Moses' death, Joshua had been recognised as the new leader of Israel, and he led the people across the River Jordan and into the Promised Land. Now, possibly forty years later, aged 110, he calls the people together again. He knows that he is soon to die but still displays the shepherd care for the people which he had exercised for so many years. What an example that must have been to the people! Too many before and since have spoilt a lifetime of service by radically departing from the path of faithful commitment.

As Joshua speaks to the people, he firstly reminds them of the great faithfulness of God. He then reminds them of his own experience and his personal knowledge of that faithfulness. Lastly he issues the great challenge that still resonates with us today:

He ... reminds them of his own experience and his personal knowledge of that faithfulness.

“ ... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether

the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
(Joshua 24:15)

Here was a man who was still satisfied with his God after so many years. Joshua remained true to God until the very end of his life and that is no small achievement. As we grow older, we ought to have a wealth of experience to draw from and pass on to the next generation. It is one thing reading in the Bible that we have a faithful God but quite another to hear the real life experiences of older believers which we can relate to, reinforcing this truth. Our testimony ought to be something that we are happy to share, because it should be the story of a wonderfully faithful God.

But then Joshua issues them with a choice. Would the people now follow the false gods of the people around about them? In his own mind, Joshua had decided that he and his household

He was sure that his God would go with him and so he would not walk alone.

would follow the one true God. If that meant walking alone and out of step with the rest of society, then so be it. He was sure that his God would go with him and so he would not walk alone. Nor does he accept the people's initial decision to follow God. He says that God is a jealous God and cannot tolerate idolatry and half-heartedness. The people reassure Joshua that the decision to follow God is one they will keep and that they are prepared to put away their false gods. I think this shows the real heart of love that Joshua had for the people. He was not some grumpy old man, seeing nothing but bad in the younger generations. His complaint against them, far from dissuading them, made them more sure that they would follow God. This could only have been because the people knew that Joshua really cared for them.

Today, we need older ones, who over many years have ‘served the Lord’ and have spent time investing in the lives of the next generation, to challenge them to stand up and make this choice for themselves. But it will be meaningful only if the challenge comes from one who has, and still does, serve the Lord.

But it will be meaningful only if the challenge comes from one who has, and still does, serve the Lord.

Caleb – the continuing (Joshua 14)

Caleb, along with Joshua, had been one of the spies sent out by Moses to spy out the Promised Land. Together they had brought back a favourable report, but the other ten spies had caused the people to tremble and doubt that God would give them the land. Caleb had been 40 then, and for the next forty years he had endured the hardships of life in the wilderness as all his contemporaries died under the judgement of God. Then under the leadership of Joshua, for the next five years he experienced the dangers of campaign life as the Israelites entered the land and fought against one enemy after another. In chapter 14, we read that Caleb came to Joshua to ask for an inheritance of his own with the pledge:

“As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day;I shall be able to drive [the Anakim] out just as the LORD said.” (Joshua 14:11,12)

Here was Caleb, a man of 85, and he still had a desire for the earthly inheritance he had been promised. I am sure that the years of hardship in the wilderness physically hardened Caleb in preparation for his final years. As younger believers, we should not necessarily look for easier circumstances and a more comfortable life. God may well be preparing us for some service

yet to come. As Christians we have a far greater inheritance, to be enjoyed now in this lifetime, as well as in the life to come. We need to have a real desire to enjoy everything that God has for us now and pursue this with the same kind of zeal that Caleb had. Our physical bodies may not allow us still to climb

As Christians we have a far greater inheritance, to be enjoyed now in this lifetime, as well as in the life to come.

mountains but standing fast to what the Bible says may well be the equivalent to us today of possessing the hill country. It would be so much easier to compromise our beliefs, to avoid confrontation and to allow anything to go on just so we can have a quiet life. But there are still spiritual battles to be fought today.

But there are still spiritual battles to be fought today.

Who is going to take on the battle for the authority of the Bible, or the fight against materialism? Who will fight for the family unit or against the decline in morality that we see today?

Because of Caleb's tenacity, Hebron became a part of his inheritance, secure after the defeat of the enemies who surrounded the town; and Caleb would not know that one day Hebron would become the capital city of David, Israel's greatest king. (2 Samuel 2:11). Only eternity will fully tell the benefit of what we do for God here upon earth. We may not be around long enough to see it, but each generation truly 'stands on the shoulders of giants', as the physicist Sir Isaac Newton said when he acknowledged his indebtedness to those who had gone before him.

Moses, Joshua & Caleb

EXAM 2

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. In what part of the life of Moses did he learn that he was nothing?
 - a. First 40 years
 - b. Second 40 years
 - c. Third 40 years
2. From where did Moses view the promised land?
 - a. The banks of the River Jordan
 - b. Mt. Carmel
 - c. Mt. Nebo
3. What kind of care did Joshua display at the end of his life?
 - a. Military protection
 - b. Shepherd
 - c. Like a gardener nurturing new shoots
4. Why did the people accept Joshua's initial rebuff of their pledge of loyalty?
 - a. They understood that allowances need to be made for the older generation
 - b. They knew Joshua really cared for them
 - c. They were determined to allow Joshua to die with an easy mind.
5. Part of Caleb's inheritance included the city that David would later use as his capital. This was
 - a. Hebron
 - b. Bethlehem
 - c. Jerusalem

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. It is acceptable that as we grow old our interest in things which do not directly affect us will diminish.
7. Moses showed his spiritual vision by preparing Joshua to continue after his death.
8. Joshua had many regrets as he looked back at the end of his life.
9. Caleb was about 45 years old when he asked for his inheritance.
10. Caleb's inheritance included extensive valley plains suitable for farming.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What kinds of service are open particularly to the older generation?

Chapter 4

Solomon

So far in this course we have considered the lives of six men who ended their lives well. It is a real challenge to us as we grow older; how are we going to live out our final years? Of course, none of us knows just when those years will be so it is good to be wholehearted in our commitment to God from our youth. Such a man was Solomon. However, as we shall see in this lesson and the next, a good start in life, and even a good middle, does not guarantee a good end. In these two chapters we consider two kings who made some terrible mistakes in later life. There is no room for complacency in life. We all need to approach each day with a fresh sense of dependence upon God.

... a good start in life ... does not guarantee a good end.

Solomon made such a good start to his kingship. In 1 Kings chapter 3 we read:

“Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (vv7-9)

‘The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honour, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”’ (1 Kings 3:7-14)

So in chapter 4 we read that God gave Solomon

“wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.” (1 Kings 4:29)

That great wisdom was put to good effect too. In chapters 5 and 6 we read about the construction of the Temple. It took four years to lay the foundation and a further seven to finish the construction. This was a work that was properly planned, patiently performed and persistently perfected. Sometimes we rush into a project without considering the cost and then find it is too high and so give up. At other times, we may just lose interest and grow bored and look for some new excitement. Here we have a man who not only desired to do what was right but also followed through on that desire until it was completed.

In chapter 8 we read about Solomon’s wonderful prayer as he dedicated the Temple to God. The glory of God filled the Temple to such a degree that the priests could not continue performing their work. What a high point in the life of Solomon and the nation of Israel! Because Solomon had asked for wisdom, in a

spirit of humility, wanting what was best for the people of God, God had blessed and prospered him. The borders of his kingdom extended beyond those that had existed under David, his father, and were greater than at any time before, or since. Life could not have been much better for Solomon. It really is a wonderful experience to live through times where God is so obviously at work. If only Solomon had maintained this kind of outlook! Sadly, however, it was not to be and so we shall see that he became self-sufficient, self-serving and self-satisfying. His downfall was as great as his rise to power and led to his crying out in despair in later life,

Because Solomon had asked for wisdom, in a spirit of humility, ... God had blessed and prospered him. .

“And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” (Ecclesiastes 1:17 – 18)

Before we look at the specifics of Solomon’s downfall, we need to understand the warning that Moses had given to the people before they entered the Promised Land. God had really intended that He alone would lead the people but recognised that the nation of Israel would want to be like the other nations and have their own king. So God had issued the following warning:

“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ Neither shall he multiply wives for

himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” (Deuteronomy 17:14-17)

Well that was a pretty clear warning which does not leave much room for mis-interpretation!

Self-sufficient

2 Chronicles chapter 9 gives us a picture of life in Solomon’s court. The extravagance and the splendour of what was visible was breathtaking. Remember God had promised that He would make Solomon rich because of his request to rule Israel with wisdom. But Moses had also given warning that the king was not to greatly multiply silver and gold for himself! How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory things? Well, it must be in the same way that God expects of us today! Solomon could have used the vast wealth he received in giving it back to God and easing the poverty of others. Instead he kept it for himself and it soon became a snare to him. He needed more and more until even silver became pretty worthless because of his vast fortune in gold.

In general today, as we grow older we also become richer - in terms of disposable income and time, that we have some choice how to spend. This is not wrong and there is nothing to be ashamed of in earning a lot of money, or becoming rich. But we do need to take serious note of the way in which money had a bad effect upon Solomon. For sure, none of us is ever likely to be as rich as he was, but there is still a danger in becoming ‘comfortably off’. Upon retirement, the opportunity may arise to spend more time serving God and building up your local church . Once the children have left home, there may be the opportunity to downsize and release capital to help relieve the financial pressure on the next generation or to support the many Christian organisations reliant on generous giving to keep going. It is important to see growing old and the ‘riches’ that this often

It is important to see growing old and the 'riches' that this often brings as an opportunity to do more for the Lord, ...

brings as an opportunity to do more for the Lord, rather than falling into the trap that Solomon fell into

and using one's time and wealth to become too comfortable and self-sufficient.

The real danger in self-sufficiency is that we then do not rely upon God for everything. Then I do not need to pray,

"Give us this day our daily bread" because I know that I have enough savings in the bank to feed myself many times over. My possessions

My possessions bind me to this life ...

bind me to this life and rob me of the enjoyment of the life to come. This is fatal to healthy spiritual living and is tragic the closer we come to the end of our lives.

Self-serving

1 Kings 10:26-29 gives us a fuller insight into the downfall of Solomon. Not only was Solomon fabulously rich, he accumulated horses and chariots for himself, again in direct disobedience to the warning that Moses had given. Solomon's kingdom stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Euphrates and he was going to make sure that nobody took it from him. But who had given it to him? Who had rescued the Israelites

from Egypt? God had! Who had defeated the people of Jericho? God had! Who had killed the giant Goliath? God had, using the untrained arm of a humble shepherd lad. God had always kept His people and He was well able to do so still. But the temptation Solomon faced, that he could do this job himself, would have tested the faith of the most faithful

God was no longer required ... He had become redundant.

servant, and most of us are not people of great faith.

God was no longer required to protect His people. He had become redundant.

As we grow old there is a similar danger for all of us. As I started out on married life I was nervous that I might make a mess of it and so I depended upon God for His help. As I started a family, I was scared and so I depended upon God for wisdom. Now that I have been married for years and the children have all grown up, there is a real danger of feeling that I can manage on my own. Also I have participated in church life for many years and so perhaps think that I can keep things going there well enough. Has God really become redundant in my life now that I have so many years of experience behind me? If

It really does take a deliberate act of choice and a strong faith to acknowledge that every day I totally need His help ...

He has, then all my activity, particularly that which is ‘spiritual’, is just serving to bolster my pride. I have stopped serving God and have become self-serving – my proud conscience is kept quiet. It really does take a deliberate act of choice and a strong faith to acknowledge that every day I totally need His help and His leading, and then to live that out in the many choices I make each day.

Self-satisfied

The first thirteen verses of 1 Kings chapter 11 give us the third cause of Solomon’s downfall. So we read,

“But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites — from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.”

What a disaster in his family life and little wonder his own son went so badly wrong. By this time in Solomon’s life we see a man

who could not say ‘no’ to himself. Even people had become mere possessions. Remember how Moses had warned that this would happen. To ignore what God has said in His word is always foolish. To be given great wisdom and then to act as if ‘there is no God’ or ‘any old god will do as there are so many’ makes Solomon the greatest of fools. It is not difficult to see how it happened, each new wife bringing some new ritual, some new philosophy. Solomon wanted to keep them happy while his lust burned bright. No doubt Jehovah still had a place, but only as one among many, and that was not a place which He would tolerate. Neither will God tolerate such a place today!

*To ignore what God
has said in His word
is always foolish.*

Now we may not have many ‘wives’ as we grow old, but it is entirely possible that we have become married to our career, or to the golf course, or to the tea-shop, or to our wardrobe! Anything that holds our affection more than the Lord does is the modern equivalent of Solomon taking many foreign wives. Time that could have been given to the Lord in direct service has been frittered away in pursuing a career well past retirement. Hours that could have been spent in serving the Christian community have been wasted in pursuing some hobby that we never had time or money for in early life. I do not suppose Solomon woke up one day and decided he would marry all 700 wives at once. Rather I think it would have been one by one. On reflection he may even have surprised himself and wondered how he could ever have accumulated so many. How sad it will be if we get to the end of our lives and are left wondering where the years have gone, and how we have accumulated so much that has no heavenly value!

The story is told of a young girl who was taken to the sweet shop by her mother. She had one penny to spend. As the girl looked at all the sweet jars she chopped and changed her mind again and

Each of us has only one life to spend, ...We really do need to ensure that it is spent wisely.

again. Eventually her exasperated mother snapped, 'Hurry up dear, you only have one penny to spend!' 'That is the problem', cried her daughter, 'I only have one penny to spend!'

Each of us has only one life to spend, whether young or old. We really do need to ensure that it is spent wisely. Sadly, Solomon in his later years, did not.

Solomon

EXAM 3

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. How did Solomon see himself when God invited him to ask for whatever he wanted?
 - a. An inexperienced king
 - b. A willing learner
 - c. A little child
2. How long did it take Solomon to build the temple?
 - a. 4 years
 - b. 11 years
 - c. 20 years
3. In marrying many wives Solomon displayed his
 - a. Self-sufficiency
 - b. Self-serving
 - c. Self-satisfying
4. Solomon's kingdom stretched from the Mediterranean to the
 - a. River Euphrates
 - b. River Jordan
 - c. River Tigris
5. Jehovah was happy to accept
 - a. any place in Solomon's life
 - b. first place among others
 - c. only his exclusive affection

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. God's offer to lengthen Solomon's life was based upon his obedience.
7. The nation of Israel expanded under Solomon to an extent never seen before or since.
8. God had wanted to be the sole Ruler of Israel.
9. It is possible to display a self-serving attitude in my church life.
10. Solomon married women from the nations surrounding Israel.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What kinds of things are likely to be the equivalent for us today of Solomon marrying 'many foreign wives' which led to his downfall?

Chapter 5

Hezekiah

In the previous chapter we studied the life of a man who started well but finished very badly. This chapter follows a similar pattern and reinforces the warning to each one of us that past success is no excuse for taking it easy. We read about the early years of Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kings 18:3-7:

... past success is no excuse for taking it easy.

“And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went.”

We need to remember that when God gives His verdict on someone He does not flatter to deceive. Hezekiah really must have made a remarkable start to his reign and as a younger man wholeheartedly served God. It is worth noting the three key elements to this victorious life of faith. Firstly, **he did what was right**. Talk is cheap and it is all too easy to say the right things. God looks for actions that truly reflect

God looks for actions that truly reflect what we believe.

what we believe. Secondly, **he trusted in the LORD**. What we believe, and more importantly, in whom we believe is vital. Thirdly, **he did not depart from following Him** and so the LORD was with him. We all need to persist in following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is a journey that will last for the whole of our lives.

Life was not easy for Hezekiah. He saw the northern tribes of Israel carried off into exile and experienced continued attacks from the enemy. Years of unfaithfulness had left the nation spiritually weak and ripe for the discipline of God. After many years of warfare, Hezekiah agrees a punitive peace with Sennacherib king of Assyria, and to pay for it he gives him all the silver that was in the Temple and strips the gold from the doors and the pillars (2 Kings 18:15,16). Perhaps exhausted from prolonged responsibility, was Hezekiah now finding the cost of faithfully serving God too high?

If Hezekiah thought he could buy his way to peace and a quiet life then he was mistaken. Before long he found that Jerusalem was again under siege from the forces of Sennacherib. He does the right thing in speaking to Isaiah the prophet, but his words are interesting. In 2 Kings 19:4 he twice refers to **'the LORD your God'** rather than the LORD **our** God. I just wonder whether Hezekiah was spiritually weary and the vibrant reality had been drained from his experience with God. He would still do the right thing and say the right thing, but his heart was not fully in it. Many years later, the church at Ephesus was warned that they had **'left their first love'** (Revelation 2:4) and this is a real problem for all of us.

The outward Christian testimony is still maintained but what we desire more than His glory is our peace.

That wholehearted zeal we perhaps once had has grown cool. The outward Christian testimony is still maintained but what we desire more than His glory is our peace.

Isaiah sent Hezekiah a message that Jerusalem would soon be free from the threat of attack, and so it proved to be. The might of the Assyrian army was destroyed by the angel of the LORD, and Sennacherib was left to retreat back to Nineveh, his capital city. Not long afterwards he was assassinated by two of his own sons. Hezekiah had been delivered, not by paying a ransom but by the power of God. However, he became ill and again sent to Isaiah for help. The solemn message of Isaiah was that Hezekiah was about to die. In a deeply felt prayer of repentance Hezekiah pleads with God for more time. Interestingly, God allows him an extra fifteen years of life. Isaiah brings him the news that he would recover but the judgement of God would fall on his descendants instead. The reaction from Hezekiah is worth reading, in 2 Kings 20:19;

Hezekiah had been delivered, not by paying a ransom but by the power of God.

‘So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!” For he said, “Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?”’

There are three lessons to be learned from this late episode in the life of Hezekiah. Firstly, when Hezekiah finally does die we read that he was succeeded by his son Manasseh who was twelve years old (2 Kings 21:1). He was probably born therefore, in the period after Hezekiah’s serious illness, during the fifteen extra years of life that God allowed Hezekiah. From the rest of chapter 21 we see that Manasseh was a truly dreadful king, and from a human point of view, it would have been better if he had not been born. Imagine shedding so ***‘much innocent blood’*** that it ***‘filled Jerusalem from one end to the other!’*** (v16). Had Hezekiah lived to see his son grow into adulthood, surely he would have regretted those extra years. If only he had died when he had been sick, he would have spared the kingdom so much misery.

In today's society we celebrate longevity. In many ways this is right and good. Those who live for a long time and whose lives are full of good works towards others deserve to be celebrated and respected. Respect shown to old people is a sign of a good and healthy society. When we do not care for and provide for those who are old then we can be sure that we are heading in the wrong direction. But that respect must be earned and deserved. There is nothing worse than eighty or a

As we stand on the precipice of eternity, may God give us all a sense of what really matters, and the strength to do what is required of us.

hundred years of self-serving waste. Too many people today seem to think that because they lived during a certain period, or because they have reached a certain age, they deserve to be respected. Yet their lives now and the way they have lived give no cause to merit respect. We must remind ourselves that the time we have here on earth needs to be used profitably and so make these precious years count. As we stand on the precipice of eternity, may God give us all a sense of what really matters, and the strength to do what is required of us.

Secondly, during those fifteen years, Hezekiah behaved foolishly. He made an alliance with Babylon to bolster his defence against Assyria. Indeed he even displayed the wealth of his treasury to the Babylonian messengers. No doubt he felt good about the alliance and his own perceived importance. Little did he realise it would be Babylon that would not only sweep away the hostile Assyrians, but destroy his beloved Jerusalem and carry his descendants into captivity. The seeds of Jerusalem's destruction were sown in the reign of Hezekiah. That should make us pause and think. What kind of spiritual inheritance are we leaving to the following generations?

What kind of spiritual inheritance are we leaving to the following generations?

I well remember a time many summers ago. We were on holiday

as a family and my parents were with us. One morning my son ran down the stairs shouting, “Grandpa, I have found a really cool verse in the Bible!” The verse in question was Proverbs 13:22, **“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children.”** You could almost see the pound signs in his eyes! It **was said** rather ‘tongue in cheek’ and to complete the story, my son values far more highly the true spiritual legacy that his grandpa has given him. It is right and proper that due time is given to our financial affairs. Money that the Lord has given to us during our lives should be used wisely after our deaths. In terms of our property, it is far more challenging to give away what the Lord has given to us as much as possible during our lifetime. Leaving a large estate to our children or to the Lord’s work after our death is a good thing. Giving it away during our lifetime may be better!

Money that the Lord has given to us during our lives should be used wisely after our deaths.

However, we perhaps do not make such careful provision for the **spiritual** welfare of our ‘children’s children’. I do not just mean our biological grandchildren but also the following generations in the Christian family. There are at least two great privileges and strengths of advancing years. Firstly you are likely to have more discretionary time available. There can be few better ways of using that time than investing it in the future generations. This will involve really getting to know the individuals concerned and understanding the kind of world in which they are growing up. Establishing and maintaining these links is necessary if effective communication between the generations is going to take place. As an aside very often this active interest in the next generations also has a beneficial effect on the older person, keeping them younger for longer!

Secondly, you have the benefit of being living proof of the keeping power of God. Learning what the Bible says is vital.

Understanding what each verse means and how these verses relate to one another in context is a necessary part of spiritual development. But there is also a role for being able to say “this is what these verses mean and this is how they worked out in my experience.” When a new bridge opens, it is one thing to be told by the engineer that all the proper checks have been done. It is far more reassuring to see other traffic using the bridge before I do.

Few pioneering Christians are born in any generation. Most of us

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prefer to follow in another's footsteps. As we grow older our goal should be to live lives that are consistent with the truth of God's word so that others may want to follow our example. My grand-daughter loves to sit in my mother's chair at church, put on her hat and scarf and gloves and tell everyone “I'm great grandma”. It makes me smile, but challenges me to hope that people will want to be like me when I am that age.

Sadly, the history of the church gives repeated testimony that the mistakes made by believers in one generation were not sorted out at the time, but instead bequeathed to the next generation. Very few generations leave the world in a better state than they inherited it. But as Christians, we know the God who is powerful enough to enable us in our own personal circumstances to make proper provision for the next generation.

Thirdly, the response of Hezekiah, if taken at face value, is disappointing in the extreme. What he is essentially saying in verse 19 is that he does not care that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed because at least it will not be in his lifetime. In fairness to Hezekiah, he may not have meant this and it is possible to read what he says in a more positive way. But whether or not

Hezekiah meant what he said, there is all too great a danger that we can fall into that mindset. So long as things carry on the way they are in my life then that is all I really care about! We cannot deny that the testimony of the church in the 21st century Western world is declining. If we carry on the way we are then we are placing the next generation in an impossible position. It is unreasonable to expect the younger generations of Christians to behave in a certain way just because it is what we are used to. Change is needed and needed now. We need to be better students of the Bible than our parents were. We need to be less attached to this world than our parent's generation. We need to be wholeheartedly attached to Christ, presenting the Gospel in a relevant and culturally sensitive way. Our great challenge from Hezekiah is to be the generation that leaves the Christian testimony healthier than we inherited it. With God's help and with His guidance we can be different. Maybe revival and growth will start with the prayer of a housebound believer, unable to do anything but pray, for **“the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”** (James 5:16).

Our great challenge from Hezekiah is to be the generation that leaves the Christian testimony healthier than we inherited it. With God's help and with His guidance we can be different.

Hezekiah

Exam 4

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Which of the following did not characterise the start of Hezekiah's reign?
 - a. Military expansion
 - b. Removal of idolatrous images
 - c. Bronze serpent broken in pieces
2. What was the first key element to Hezekiah's success?
 - a. He did what was right
 - b. He trusted in the Lord
 - c. He did not depart from following Him
3. How many times did Hezekiah say to Isaiah "the Lord your God"?
 - a. Once
 - b. Twice
 - c. Three times
4. Where do we read: "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children"?
 - a. Proverbs 5:8
 - b. Proverbs 8:22
 - c. Proverbs 13:22
5. Hezekiah was relieved that the destruction of Jerusalem would not take place in his lifetime. This reaction was
 - a. understandable and acceptable
 - b. disappointing in the extreme
 - c. natural and unforgiveable

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Hezekiah saw the northern kingdom of Israel destroyed by the Babylonians.
7. Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh.
8. The church in Thyatira in Revelation 2 was condemned for leaving their first love.
9. The seeds of Judah's destruction were sown during the reign of Hezekiah.
10. The living example of what the Bible teaches is a vital part of Biblical teaching.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How can we ensure that we do not have regrets as we approach the end of our lives?

Chapter 6

Simeon and Anna

The last two lessons have given us a real warning that though we may start well in our Christian lives there is no guarantee that we will finish well. There must be constant dependence upon God that He will enable us to “finish the race” in a way that brings glory to Him. Simeon and Anna, whom we read about in Luke 2:21 - 38 were two such individuals. We shall consider Simeon in his **character** and then his **comfort** before thinking about Anna in her **contentment** and finally her **communication**. But before we think about the excellent example set by these two elderly saints we will consider the context and circumstances in which we find them.

Verses 21–24 describe three different ceremonies that cover a time period of 40 or so days after the birth of Jesus. On the eighth day after a boy was born in Israel he would be circumcised and given a name. This would probably have taken place in Bethlehem itself. The act of circumcision demonstrated his belonging to God whilst the giving of a name was more

... “Saviour”. From birth, it was clear that this was Someone with a particular task.

important than in today’s society. It was used to particularly identify a child. The angelic message to Joseph was that this unique child was to be given the name Jesus, which means “Saviour”. From birth, it was clear that this was Someone with a particular task.

Once a firstborn son was over 31 days, he would be taken to the

Temple and presented to God. All firstborn males belonged to God and a price had to be paid to redeem them. We read about this in Exodus 13:2, 12 and Numbers 18:15–17. Five shekels of silver would have been paid by Joseph and Mary into the Temple treasury. This was the rite of Presentation. Lastly after 40 days a mother would perform the rite of Purification and offer two doves or two young pigeons before being pronounced ceremonially clean. She was then able to fully enter into the religious life of her community again.

Jesus was brought up in a godly family. From birth He was surrounded not only by the love of both human parents, but also by the blessing that God gives to parents who seek to obey Him. We can do no more for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren than surround them with our prayers and godly influence. Often the rites of Presentation and Purification would be performed together. So we can envisage Mary and Joseph making the trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem possibly just the once - after 40 days. It was on this visit to the Temple that they were to meet Simeon and Anna.

We can do no more for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren than surround them with our prayers and godly influence.

Character

We are not in fact told how old Simeon was, although I picture him as well advanced in years. Certainly his character is described to us, he was both righteous and devout. I think that by ‘righteous’ is meant he behaved in a way that was outwardly right towards his fellow man and by ‘devout’ that he behaved in a way which was inwardly acceptable to God. This is a powerful combination for all of us to copy. Too often we may focus on doing the right thing, but it may come from a proud

He was both righteous and devout. ... This is a powerful combination for all of us to copy.

heart or any number of false motives. At other times, we may be so taken up with thoughts about God that we neglect our responsibilities towards others. Here was a man who displayed admirable balance. Because these appear to have been settled characteristics in Simeon's life, we read that the Holy Spirit was **upon** him. (Today, all 'born again' Christians are **indwelt** by the Holy Spirit because they are covered by Christ's perfect righteousness. The **indwelling** Holy Spirit will never leave us and is able to guide us each day.) This had led to the wonderful blessing of being told that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. The Messiah was God's chosen deliverer – the One who would bring salvation to Israel and blessing to the whole world.

*Do we awaken
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day when we get
to see Jesus face
to face?*

What an incredible privilege! Day after day he might have woken up thinking, "Perhaps today!" Night after night he had maybe gone to sleep with a mild sense of disappointment. As Christians, we have been given the wonderful promise of the Lord's return for His people. Do we awaken each day with the hope that this might be the day when we get to see Jesus face to face?

Comfort

Again, Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit and came into the Temple courts where he met Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. Simeon took Jesus into his arms and found his ultimate fulfilment. He had seen "**the Lord's Christ**" (2:26). Life could not get any better than it was right at that very moment. With a full heart he praised God:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32)

*Here was a man
who was totally at
peace with God.*

Here was a man who was totally at peace with God. This was undoubtedly the very best day of his life. If he died now, he would die completely satisfied!

As our years draw on, we may find ourselves overtaken by worry and regret. If only we had done this or that. We speak about bucket lists these days containing all our unfulfilled hopes. Simeon's bucket list was empty and that is a good state to be in. There is a real challenge as to our motives and aspirations in this. Do we have a long list of things which leave us with regret, or that we wish we still had the ability to do? Simeon would teach us that true comfort and happiness comes from seeing Jesus. We do not have the promise that one day we can hold the infant Jesus in our arms and see Him with our physical eyes. But each one of us can see Him by faith and hold Him close to our hearts. It is only by drawing close to Him that we will find lasting fulfilment in life. Sadly, we often fail to learn the lesson of experience. We may have looked forward to something for a long time – perhaps a holiday for example. It has come and gone. It may have been all we had hope for but it is still over and we are left dreaming of our next experience. We remain unfulfilled, and always will do if we focus on earthly things.

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*... we need to look
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Simeon was completely ready to die. I suspect his thinking went along the lines that: “my life is absolutely perfect. Anything that happens from now on will be an anticlimax so, please Lord, take me home now.” Our materialistic society will invariably fail in delivering this kind of comfort so we need to look to Christ to bring comfort in our lives, whatever our age. In the words of Helen Lemmel's chorus:

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth
will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”

I can well imagine Simeon saying just such words and knowing them to be absolutely true, if a little understated!

As he held the young baby in his arms, who could have imagined the momentous changes that were going to come upon the world because of this child. Here he was, cradling **‘the Light of the world’** - the fulfilment of the light I saiah had spoken about (9:2; 42:6;60:1-3). He realised that this child was indeed remarkably special. But Simeon spoke of the future too – the fall and rise again of Israel, the revelation of the innermost thoughts of many and the pain that would break Mary’s heart. Closeness to Christ does not make us insensitive to the lives of others but it does mean that the serenity we possess will not be shaken.

Closeness to Christ does not make us insensitive to the lives of others but it does mean that the serenity we possess will not be shaken.

Contentment

The second person whom Mary and Joseph met in the Temple that day was Anna. She was a remarkable woman who, like Deborah and Huldah in the Old Testament, had played a vital part in the religious life of the nation. Anna had been married for seven years but since losing her husband had devoted her life to God in the Temple with prayer and fasting. She was now at least 84 and so she had been on her own for most of her life. Anna was of the tribe of Asher – one of the 10 northern tribes of Israel which had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians hundreds of years earlier.

Anna ... devoted her life to God in the Temple with prayer and fasting .

Those tribes had largely been ‘lost’, and the majority of those now living in Israel would have been from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Perhaps her ancestors had fled from the invading Assyrians and become refugees in the southern kingdom of Judah generations earlier, choosing devotion to God above personal wealth.

If we assume that Anna had married as a young woman, like most women would at that time, then we might ask the question “Why had she not remarried?” There could not have been all that many people left who would trace their lineage back to the tribe of Asher. Could she not have remarried and had children to keep the tribe alive? And if she was not concerned about tribal ambition, surely she would have had her own personal desires to be a mother and to pour her love into her own offspring. However, God had not enabled this to happen and for maybe 50 – 60 years she had remained a widow and childless. For many women this would have been a source of bitterness and discontent. Why had God dealt with her in this way and left her with so many unfulfilled dreams? Rather than turning to self-pity, Anna turned to self-denial where she found contentment. She made the Temple courts her home and devoted herself to the worship of God night and day. Sometimes I hear that older folk do not need so much sleep and find themselves awake in the early hours of the morning. The TV or the iron are called into service to wile away the time. Anna sets us a great example of how to spend those wakeful hours – in the worship of God! I think she would have agreed that there were not enough hours in the day to exhaust all the reasons for such worship.

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I do not think this kind of spirit comes naturally. I think her behaviour tells us that Anna had a will of iron, which ‘forced’ her to worship rather than complain about her lot in life. But not only was her time spent in worshipping God, she also spent time

fasting and praying. She was in the habit of denying herself those legitimate pleasures of life, so that she could dedicate her time and money to God. In our modern society we tend to deny ourselves nothing and in doing so miss out on the very best that

Prayer is one of those activities open to everyone, and yet few perhaps really devote themselves to it.

God has for us. I think that Anna's appreciation of her God would have dwarfed mine! Her time was spent in prayer. Prayer is one of those activities open to everyone, and yet few perhaps really devote themselves to it. Just recently I heard about a young boy who had to go home from school every day at lunchtime so that he could help his semi disabled father get up off his knees, as he had spent the morning in prayer. As a young man I remember visiting the home of an elderly woman who seemed to know so much about me, even though we had never met. She spent hours each day praying for young people like me, and I had never known.

These kinds of activities are to be admired and copied, they are open to every believer who wants to do them. In eternity, I think 'little old' ladies like Anna will be the 'giants' in Heaven and many will be there, because of their faithfulness. Instead of letting the disappointments of life make her bitter and lonely, she had found true contentment in the only place it can be found – in God Himself.

Communication

The Holy Spirit was as alive and at work in her heart as it had been in the heart of Simeon. At just the moment when he was giving thanks to God for the baby Jesus, Anna comes to the special family and also thanks God for them. But there is a big difference in the reactions of Simeon and Anna to meeting Jesus. Simeon in effect is ready to die perfectly content. Anna is ready to serve and immediately starts to tell everyone about Jesus. The many years of worship, fasting and prayer had all been leading

up to this moment. She would have spoken with real authority, as all those around her would be aware of her previous lifestyle. Are there times when we continue to serve God with little outward result or seeming purpose. Anna too, may have had these kinds of thoughts. But now God would bring meaning to all those barren years with the wonderful testimony of this godly lady.

From the prophecy of Daniel in particular there was a general air of expectation in Israel that God was about to do something. He had been quiet for over 400 years. Israel had not been visited by a prophet from God for so long. Generations had come and gone without ever hearing a message directly from God. Now, on this particular day, God would speak loudly and clearly. And He chose to do so through this godly old woman! What an encouragement to each one of us. Perhaps we think that God could never use me. Perhaps we think that our lives have never amounted to much and we are past our best years. Anna gives us cause to hope, but only if we are prepared to follow her on the difficult path she took first. First the cross, later the crown! It was the way of the Baby she spoke about and it must be the way for us too.

*First the cross,
later the crown!
It was the way
of the Baby she
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it must be the
way for us too.*

Simeon & Anna

EXAM 5

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. The soonest the rite of Presentation could be performed was after
 - a. 8 days
 - b. 31 days
 - c. 40 days
2. What wonderful promise to Christians would remind us of the promise given to Simeon?
 - a. Our home in Heaven
 - b. The Lord's return
 - c. The indwelling Holy Spirit
3. Simeon saw Jesus 'face to face'. Which New testament verse confirms this as a hope which every Christian shares?
 - a. Romans 8:1
 - b. Philippians 3:10
 - c. 1 John 3:2
4. What two characteristics do we learn from Anna?
 - a. Comfort and character
 - b. Concern and care
 - c. Contentment and communication
5. For how long had God been silent before He spoke to Israel in the person of His Son?
 - a. 250 years
 - b. 400 years
 - c. 1,000 years

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Primarily devoutness has to do with our relationship with other men.
7. Simeon could die in peace only once he had seen the infant Jesus. ___
8. Anna was born into the ancient tribe of Asher.
9. Anna found contentment in self-denial.
10. A life of faithful prayer is open only to a select few.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What 'tools' are available to us to encourage us to pray faithfully?

Chapter 7

Paul

As we come to our final chapter in this study we consider one of the most influential and unique men in history. He was a ‘chosen vessel’ to fulfil God’s purposes for his life. Hence comparisons with him may not be particularly helpful! However, on a human level, one of the reasons why he achieved so much was that as he grew older he had the basics right. In this he leaves us a pattern to follow – an ABC of growing old if you like and it is this that we will focus on in this chapter - Appreciation, Busy and Continuing.

...as (Paul) grew older he had the basics right.

Appreciation

Three times in the book of Acts we read about the conversion experience of Paul on the road to Damascus:

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (Acts 9:1-4)

“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around

me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (Acts 22:6-7)

“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.” (Acts 26:12-13)

If you look carefully you will notice that each time Paul’s conversion is described, the way in which he remembers the light of His presence increases - “a light”, “a great light”, and “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun”. The three accounts cover a period of about 26 years. Now sometimes memories become distorted as we get older but I do not think this is the case here. I think that the more Paul thought about it, the more the brilliance of being in the presence of Jesus affected him. The outer remembering reflected an inner appreciation of who Jesus was. I think this is an absolutely vital aspect of growing old. Sometimes we may become jaded with the things of this life. We become too familiar with something we have done many times before and what once held a great attraction and excitement, now is less appealing.

Over the period of Paul’s life as a Christian, his appreciation of the person of the Lord Jesus grew and grew. He never lost the wonder of the **“Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”** (Galatians 2:20). He retained the desire to **“know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,”** (Philippians 3:10). He still tried to get his mind to **“comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge”** (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Over the period of Paul’s life as a Christian, his appreciation of the person of the Lord Jesus grew and grew.

Perhaps you have known the Lord Jesus as your Saviour for many years. But let each of us challenge ourselves as to whether we have become satisfied with our Christian experience and decided that we now know as much as we ever will in this life. We no longer have a desire to have a fresh revelation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. If this is the case, then we have already died inside! Just imagine how different your life would be if you accepted the challenge not to get out of bed in the morning each day until you had had a fresh appreciation of how wonderful our God is! Would you still be in bed at tea time?

...there is no reason not to spend time each day reading or listening to the teaching of His word.

There is so much written and recorded high quality Bible teaching available these days that there is no reason not to spend time each day reading or listening to the teaching of His word. Websites such as emmauscourses.org, emmausuk.com, truth4today.org and keswickministries.co.uk are a great spiritual resource to make use of.

It used to be said that there are two things certain in life – death and taxes. Well let me give you two absolute certainties. Firstly, no matter how long we live there will always be new things to learn from His word about His glorious Person. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is more than capable of revealing them to us unless we have shut our minds to them and, maybe even subconsciously decided “I’m full – no more for me”. As we grow old, we may well lose our physical appetite but never let us lose our spiritual appetite!

As we grow old, we may well lose our physical appetite but never let us lose our spiritual appetite!

Busy

In this section we need to consider the final two verses of the book of Acts because I think there is a vital lesson for us in them.

“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” (Acts 28:30–31)

It is not absolutely clear how Paul spent the final years of his life. Some have suggested that he obtained a short period of freedom which allowed him to travel one last time. Others believe that he remained under house arrest. Paul was probably in his mid to late sixties by now and had we been able to meet him we may have been shocked, maybe even a little repulsed, at the physical state of this man. He had been near death and his body abused so often that I think it must have taken its toll upon him. His mind was still sharp, and he would have been running on mental energy. There would have been mornings when he groaned and every muscle ached but his attitude remained the same as when he had written to the Corinthian Christians:

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”
(1 Corinthians 9:27)

However, Paul still created new opportunities to serve his Master. Instead of having an afternoon nap he received all who came to him. Instead of discussing the economy or lamenting the younger generation he preached the kingdom of God. Instead of teaching the younger generation how to feather one’s own nest he taught them the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. What a positive role model Paul is to us as we grow older and find ourselves less mobile! Paul’s world may have shrunk to four walls but from within those walls he still retained an undiminished interest in the spiritual world outside.

What a positive role model Paul is to us as we grow older and find ourselves less mobile!

There was a time just before the Lord Jesus went to the cross when Mary came to Him and anointed him with very precious perfume. The people in the room criticised her for such wasteful extravagance. However, the Lord gave her the highest commendation that anyone of us can ever hope for: **“Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me....she has done what she could”** (Mark 14:6, 8). The Lord never expects us to do what we cannot do, but do we always do as much as we can?

*He does not regret
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he is still able to do*

Paul could have been forgiven for thinking that, following his arrest and now in poor health and restricted circumstances, his part in service was now over. Instead he looks for new fields of service and actively pursues them. He does not regret what he can no longer do but fills his time with what he is still able to do. Some people as they grow old have more free time than they have ever had and should try to use it profitably and fill it with full time service for God. Others may have less physical ability but prayer and writing and giving are necessary fields of service.

Continuing

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Paul was at the very end of his life and I am pretty sure he knew it. Scholars generally reckon he was in his mid to late sixties. As he summarises his life, he can say with confidence that what he had done had been worthwhile. He had completed his work and

had not compromised his beliefs to suit the ever changing cultural norms. This really is quite an achievement and I wonder if I will be able to say such a thing at the end of my life?

It had not been easy! 2 Corinthians 11 and 12 highlight the sufferings Paul had faced in the cause of Christ. In 2 Timothy 1:15 he had written, ***“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me...”***. The temptation to give up and be discouraged as others gave up must have been overwhelming. Paul was clearly ready to hand over the burdens of responsibility to younger men like Timothy and Titus. But in doing so, he was not giving up his own responsibilities. Right to the very end, Paul maintained an active commitment to the Christian life of service. I have known older people who have retired and have said that they ‘have never been busier.’ All that ‘free’ time is now used in serving the Lord in a way that they had not been able to when they were in employment and raising a family. What a great example! Sadly I have also known others who when retired find that the highlight of their day is turning on the TV or a trip for the groceries. There must be more to life than this!

Right to the very end, Paul maintained an active commitment to the Christian life of service

“Stay the course!” An everlasting glory awaits us as we stand upon the threshold of eternity. Life on this earth is brief and the time left to us is so short. Now is not the time to take things easier in spiritual things. Keep going on, keep looking up!

Paul EXAM 6

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Paul recalls seeing a 'great light' in his
 - a. first account of his conversion
 - b. second account of his conversion
 - c. third account of his conversion
2. Where does Paul tell us about the "Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me"?
 - a. Galatians 2:20
 - b. Philippians 3:10
 - c. Ephesians 3:18
3. Where did Paul live for 2 whole years?
 - a. In prison in Ephesus
 - b. In Rome with Priscilla and Aquila
 - c. In his own rented house
4. Paul feared disqualification because he had not
 - a. preached the gospel powerfully
 - b. understood the truth correctly
 - c. disciplined his body
5. Who was criticised for wasteful extravagance?
 - a. Mary
 - b. Barnabas
 - c. The Corinthian church

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. The three accounts of Paul's conversion cover a period of about 26 years.
7. The Holy Spirit's role is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ to us in the Bible.
8. Busyness is a normal part of Christianity.
9. Judged by appearances, Paul's life was an unqualified success.
10. The crown of righteousness will be given to all those who love Jesus' appearing.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How can we ensure that our appreciation of the Lord Jesus grows with advancing years?

Conclusion

In this book we have looked at the problems we face as we grow older and the examples that are given to us in the Bible. In the patriarchs we saw the necessity to maintain a daily walk with God, patiently waiting for His time. The experiences of life should bring us to a deeper life of worship as we grow in our appreciation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

From Moses, we saw that God had reserved the most fruitful years of his life to the end. Retirement is not death's waiting room but an exciting opportunity for renewed service. Joshua made this choice and encouraged others to follow his positive lead. Caleb set an example to the next generation that was worth following.

Solomon and Hezekiah both started so well and yet ended their lives so badly. What a warning to each of us today! Increasing affluence and ease proved a real stumbling block to Solomon. Hezekiah showed scant regard for the well-being of future generations. Both of these dangers are to be avoided if we are to serve the Lord well in our later years.

In marked contrast, Simeon and Anna give us a glowing and positive example of those who found true fulfilment well into old age. This was not in the things of this world but in the person of the infant Jesus. If we are looking to material things to make our old age fulfilling, then we are looking in the wrong place. True contentment is to be found only in the Lord Jesus.

Finally, the Apostle Paul's example to finish the race and persist until the end leaves us with a challenge that is true for us at any age. An increasing appreciation of the person of the Lord Jesus should be a normal part of life. We are to look for what we can do, no matter what our circumstances are.

Growing old is unavoidable and is not something we should even try to avoid. Growing old with regrets, growing old with bitterness is sadly all too common. Growing old with grace, as Billy Graham reminded us, is a choice. With God's help may each one of us resolve to make that positive choice today!

