

## *Women & More*

### *Accepting Life's Stages*

Lesson 18: March 12, 2015

**When does growing up stop and growing old start?** One thing the Bible is absolutely filled with is people: people in perils and people in parables; people who feared God and many more who didn't, and people in every stage of life—people God loved and cared for. Psalm 139:16b *“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

When we were young growing up in our parents' home I hope we were happy and loved and enjoyed every moment of that carefree life, remembering to be grateful. But human nature—the sin nature—dictates otherwise. In every 'stage' of life it seems we tend to long for the one passed, or look forward to the next without really being grateful for the stage of life that we're currently in. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says *“Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’—”* this whole passage is on worksheet page 4.

Think about how the seasons in a year—spring, summer, fall and winter—easily represent our lives in infancy and childhood, youth, adulthood and older still. Some don't make it through infancy; and some, like my husband's Aunt Thelma live to be 100—we celebrated with her on a July weekend in 2014. One thing we cannot do is speed up a season of life or slow it down; repeat it or skip over it altogether and move on to the next. For the believer, Jesus Christ is in control of all our life, and we're to accept with *gratitude* the seasons He gives!

In mid-August 2014, I asked my husband if when he was a child he ever wanted to be another age or in a different stage of life, and after a moment's thought he said, “I wanted to be sixteen so that I could have my first car and drive.” Interestingly, the next day my daughter called and I asked her the same question and she gave the same answer. It doesn't surprise me that they love to drive!

Many of us can't resist the urge to try and speed through some stages of life. For a little humor in the middle of a very serious subject, about those who must speed while driving, Charles Swindoll said maybe it would help them to sing:

At 45 mph... “God Will Take Care of You”

At 55 mph... “Guide Me, O thou Great Jehovah”

At 65 mph... “Nearer, My God, to Thee”

At 75 mph... “Nearer, Still Nearer!”

At 85 mph... “This World Is Not My Home”

At 95 mph... “Lord, I'm Coming Home”

Over 100... “Precious Memories”

►HUMOR on OLD AGE: “To help save the economy, the Government will announce next month that the Immigration Department will start deporting seniors instead of illegal immigrants in order to lower Social Security and Medicare costs. Older people are easier to catch and will not remember how to get back home. I started to cry when I thought of you.

Then it dawned on me...oh, fiddlesticks! I'll see you on the bus!”

Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 11:9 warned: “***Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.***” And in Joel 2:28-29, the Lord called Israel to repent and then promised: “*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.*”

Scripture contains babies and elderly; teens, adults and beyond. Look at a few:

**Infants:**

- Moses in a basket;
- Jesus in a manger, and
- All the babies put to death when Moses and Jesus were born.

**Children:**

- Samuel taken to the temple to live, and
- Jesus found accidentally left at the temple.
- The children with Jesus when He said, “...of such is the kingdom of heaven.”
- Isaac offered on an altar of sacrifice to the LORD;
- The young servant girl in the household of General Naaman;
- The boy with five loaves and two fish—lunch for 5,000, and
- Rhoda, the servant girl who left Peter waiting at the door.

**Teens:**

- David took down Goliath with a slingshot;
- Daniel taken captive to Babylon, and
- Joseph dreamed God's vision for his life at 17 and sold by his brothers.
- Mary when the angel appeared to her about the birth of Jesus, and
- Jesus worked in the carpentry shop of his earthly father.

**Adults:**

- Jesus began His earthly ministry at 30 and was crucified for us at 33, and
- The 12 disciples of Jesus—John, the Beloved, the youngest.

**Elderly:**

- Moses was 80 when he led the Israelites out of Egypt, and
- Daniel was 80 when he was thrown to the lions.
- Octogenarian Simeon, and Anna, got to see Jesus before they died!

Of Jesus' birth, Charles Swindoll very picturesquely said, "While Rome was busy making history, God arrived. He pitched His fleshly tent in silence on straw...in a stable...under a star." Then he described his home life at age 44 with his wife and four children: "...our place today resembles a cross between Grand Central Station, the Indianapolis 500, and the San Diego Zoo. But it won't always be that way. As the old newsreel says, 'Time marches on.'" If we're in the raising-our-children stage of life, drink it in slowly and take time with those we're entrusted with. Before we can imagine, the days will be done!

David in Psalm 37:25 says, "*I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.*" Proverbs 20:29 "*The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.*" 2 Chronicles 17:3a says, "*The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed.*" The Bible pictures growing older with growing wiser as a godly goal, however, older does not make wiser unless that 'older' is committed to the Lord God like Job.

→There's a young 'whipper-snippet'—one of several—in Job 32:6-9 "*So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: "I am young in years, and you are old (of Job); that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. ¶I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.' ¶But it is the spirit in a man, **the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.** ¶It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.*" Then he spoke; and he was so right about it being God Almighty who gives understanding even to the young, but what Elihu next said was way off because no one but God and the devil knew why Job was suffering.

→King Rehoboam wasn't committed to God as his father and grandfather had been! Scripture says he took the advice of the young men over the advice of the elders in the matter of whether he should lighten the load his father had placed on the people in 2 Chronicles 10:10-11. The young men said for him to tell the people: "*My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. ¶My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.*" Because of this, only Judah and Benjamin remained with him and the rest of Israel went with Jeroboam. By the way, the elders had recommended that he lighten the load on the people so that they would serve him faithfully.

Secular author John Steinbeck published his last novel in 1961. The title, *Winter of Our Discontent*, was borrowed from William Shakespeare's beginning lines in a 1594 play about King Richard III in 1594, portrayed as a discontented man who was unhappy in a world that hated him. And the season 'winter' is used to demonstrate that the discontent is full grown!

Steinbeck's protagonist is Ethan Allen Hawley, formerly an aristocrat, who suffered through his father's loss of the family fortune. He became a grocery clerk, and his wife Mary and their children resented their mediocre social and economic status and didn't value Ethan's integrity which he struggled to maintain in a corrupt society. One day he made a decision to just end his life!

In August 2014, Robin Williams, a very popular movie star and 'class clown', died at 63 by suicide—he hanged himself—his lifeless body discovered by family. Dr. John Mann, a psychologist specializing in suicide, said that some 20,000 people in the U.S. take their lives each year and most by gunshot. He described depression as a sense of distress, and in these cases so intense that there seems to be only one way out. Isn't this sad? It would be so wonderful to identify those at risk and get them the help from God's word that they so desperately need. We know that there are Christians who become despondent and take their lives as well, but know that **Jesus is still the answer!** Some will argue that these needed professional help, but many more who are not believers and get regular 'professional help' travel Satan's slippery slope to suicide.

● **There's a lot of information out there on getting started, but very little on finishing well!** We will want to finish each stage of our lives 'well' as God has defined with gratitude. God's word, His Spirit, and the preaching and teaching encouragement from His people will help us to keep going and finish well.

The true story is told about a young boy who reluctantly accompanied his mother to a concert of the famous composer and pianist, Ignace Jan Paderewski. His mother thought that being in the audience of the 'great' would help to inspire her young son's efforts on the piano. Before the program, while his mother was visiting with friends, the nine-year-old slipped to the stage and placed himself in front of the *Steinway*, and he began to play chopsticks. The crowd began to laugh and then to yell out: "Get that kid off the bench" and "Somebody stop him."

Paderewski, heard the chopsticks rendition and the yelling crowd and so he hurried out and placed his hands around both sides of the playing-boy and began to improvise a melody to go along with and enhance the boy's piece. As they continued to make music together, Paderewski whispered encouragement to "keep going" and "don't stop" in the ears of this boy.

● Jesus stopped to bless little children in Luke 18:15-17, and He did not tell the children to become like His disciples, but rather for His disciples to become like a little child. Proverbs 20:11 *"Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right."*

Eugene Peterson, in his book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, describes the effects of not finishing well on the gospel: “It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate.... In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap.”

Paul said in Philippians 4:11 that “*Covetousness, discontent and murmuring are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil.*” Someone quipped that most of the shadows of this life are caused by standing in one’s own sunshine, so our lives either shed light or cast a shadow. Are we guilty of being ungrateful more often than grateful? **Practicing gratitude for every bit and breath of life, every age and stage of life, will grow us ‘up’!** Charles Spurgeon said, “*I have learned* means we did not always know,” and of the influence of the Holy Spirit he added, “They who yield to His influences become good, they who obey His impulses do good, they who live under His power receive good. **Let us then act towards so good a person according to the dictates of gratitude.**”

•**Why are we still here?** Do we think we’re too old? Genesis 5:32 reminds: “*After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.*” Romans 14:7-9 says, “**Accept one another**, then, ***just as Christ accepted you***, in order to bring praise to God. *For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written....*” Then passages from 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49 are quoted. We are still here for the following ten reasons and more:

- To live as unto the Lord;
- To bring others to know His love;
- To sow and scatter good seed, and
- To break up fallow ground like a plowman.
  - To be a herald (publish) God’s great salvation;
  - To be ‘salt and ‘light’ on the earth;
  - To be a blessing to the world;
  - To glorify Christ in our daily life, and
  - To work for Him and to be workers together with Him!

•**Gratitude to God leads to growth in godliness.** I read about a pastor in his 80s who remarked, “I don’t know if I am finishing well, but I am finishing thankful.” To which his friend of 40 years replied that anyone who finishes life thankful, finishes well! At the end of his life, Paul told Timothy and us in 2 Timothy 4:7 “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*”