

Losing Our Health

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[0:00] We're studying growing old gracefully, and we're learning on how to finish well, and we do it by living well, one day at a time, don't we?

And last week we started to go back over some of the problems of old age and look at what the solutions that God gives us in his word are for those challenges.

We looked at financial challenges last week, just knowing whether or not we'll have enough to make it to the end, and our great need to trust in the Lord, as Spurgeon said, to kiss away our worries of old age with the promises of God.

And then the next trial that we want to look at this morning is the trial of losing good health to weakness, sickness, and disease.

You're familiar with that challenge to young people in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 1.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. But we don't often quote the rest of it because it talks further about the challenges of old age.

[1:08] 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.

So the writer is saying there are years coming that are marked by trouble. Days of trouble and years when you will say, I find no pleasure in them.

And then what follows, the rest of the chapter goes on to describe these days of trouble. And they have to do with the weakness of the body, the breakdown of the body that makes it difficult to find pleasure.

When strong men stoop, men that used to be strong and upright, they now stoop over. When the grinders cease because they are few.

And those looking through the windows grow dim. And when men rise at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint, they can hardly hear them.

[2:14] So such days of trouble without pleasure are coming for us, the writer of Ecclesiastes says. That's part of the trial of growing old. Days of not being able to do what we used to do.

Just a lack of energy. The mental slippage. The inability to think through problems. To remember names. To remember why it was you went to the basement.

Or why you're at the store. What was I coming here for? And all of it causes us great frustration. But even beyond that, there are in old age often serious illnesses.

Painful and debilitating diseases. Remember John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace. In one of his last letters, he says that he had just one disease.

But that it was incurable. It was old age. So old age may be called the common disease of our nature. Because all succumb to it in the end.

[3:25] Though many try to deny it or hold it at bay. With anti-aging supplements and treatments. And there are even products that claim to be age-reversing, don't they?

And Jason's Sunday school class a while back on sickness is an excellent theological foundation for these troubles that come upon us bodily in old age.

So I just point you to those notes or the CD of that. But God has a bigger agenda for us in old age than our perfect health.

How do we know that? Because he doesn't give us perfect health. He very well could, couldn't he? Indeed, he's going to one day. But his agenda for us here in this life, at the end of our life, is not perfect health.

He has something bigger. Look at John chapter 9. And the challenge of old age is going to be for us to buy into God's bigger agenda then when we start to face these physical maladies, bodily problems.

[4:35] John chapter 9 and verses 1 to 3. As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

This is the Lord Jesus going along. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus. But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Now, this man we learn later on in the chapter had been blind from birth and he was 40 years old.

That's what we learn later, that he's a 40-year-old man.

Now, it happened not because of any peculiar sin that God was punishing him or his parents for, Jesus says. But rather it happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

[5:34] And that would be that when Jesus Christ would come along, he would spit on the ground. He would make some mud with the saliva. He would put it in the man's eyes and tell him to go wash in the pool of Siloam.

And he would go and wash and come home seeing. And the whole thing would cause quite a stir. And he would tell everyone what Jesus of Nazareth had done for him. And so God was glorified.

The work of God was displayed in his life. Now, the thing that causes me to tremble as I read a passage like that is that God is willing to put a man through the darkness of blindness for 40 years in order to display his works in his life.

Is that your view of God? Do you see that God sometimes has an agenda bigger than just our physical ability even to see and our health?

That sometimes his plan is that 40 years we would be without that in order that his work might be displayed. Here, God's work was displayed by healing the man.

[6:48] But are there other ways that God's work is displayed in people who are sick, in old people who are sick? What are they? What are other ways that God's works are displayed?

Roger? Okay, excellent. Can anyone argue that the works of God have not been displayed in a life like that, that is so handicapped physically, and yet there's been grace given to persevere with joy?

Dare? So there's the witness of the Christian family that is dealing with their problem, physical problems with faith in God and with communion with their God, knowledge of their Lord that is a light to others.

Any other ways that God's works are displayed besides just healing? Ed? One of the things that we have wrestled with was my mother-in-law being in the nursing home.

So we have a God who has an agenda of glorifying himself by displaying his works, sometimes in the sick person themselves, sometimes in their family, sometimes in the community that's gathered around them.

[8:11] When he keeps an older person with these bodily ailments patient, content, satisfied, joyful in Christ, his works are being displayed.

Psalms 73, Asaph says in verses 25 and 26, Whom have I in heaven but you? Now this is a man who's afflicted every day, and he's able finally to come through and see, Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

So he came to see that though my flesh and my heart are failing, the Lord is my portion. He's my strength, and it's good for me to be near to him.

And when that's demonstrated in the world, what a light that sheds on our God. His works are being displayed. His value, his worth. The psalmist says, Your love is better than life, therefore my lips will glorify you.

[9:19] Psalm 63, 3. That your love is better than life. Is his love better than good health? Then let our lips glorify him as such and demonstrate that to a world that says, No, if a man doesn't have his health, he doesn't have a reason to live.

Well, our God is better than that. So the bigger agenda than our health is his glory. And that's the challenge then in old age, to embrace God's bigger agenda for your life in old age.

We get a glimpse of how to deal with deteriorating body and mind in old age from the Apostle Paul. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

We read in this letter of 2 Corinthians of the physical abuse that Paul's body suffered throughout his lifetime.

We have a whole list of it there in chapter 11 where he talks about the schedule he kept. Think about the abuse on Paul's body. He was working so hard.

[10:33] He had three times beaten with rods, five times the 39 lashes. Once he was stoned and left for dead. Three times shipwrecked and once spent a night and a day out in the open sea.

He'd gone without sleep, without food, cold and naked, often in prison. And on top of that, a nagging, painful thorn in the flesh.

Can you imagine how some of those injuries and persecutions came back to haunt him in his older age? Some of you have maybe have suffered sports injuries earlier in your career and they're now coming back to haunt you.

And you can't stoop down without your knees screaming. And here's a man who had been pummeled and beaten with rods and stones. And nowhere do we read that God left him free of the pain of physical deterioration.

Rather, we have statements to the contrary, that he felt them keenly. And we have it here in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians. He's glorying in the fact that God has put the treasure of the gospel in jars of what?

[11:47] Clay. And what's true of jars of clay? Easily breakable. Fragile. Not something that we would say, wow, that's really strong.

It's a weakness. And so all of his physical, that's verse 7, where he talks about his body as a jar of clay. And he goes on to talk about his persecutions and how he always carries around in his body the death of Jesus.

And how he says in verse 12, death is at work in us. And yet he's able to come down to verse 16 and say, therefore, we do not lose heart. Why not?

Well, he's just said in verse 14, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

So Paul is feeling the effects of hard life in his body. And yet he doesn't lose heart.

[12:54] He's thankful that this body that is wasting away will one day be raised from the dead by the Lord Jesus and presented in his presence.

So we don't have a man here that doesn't feel the physical effects of death eaten on his body.

Rather, he says there in verse 16, outwardly, we are wasting away.

Outwardly, our body is decaying. And he felt it. He felt it wasting away. But he says, though that's happening as to our physical condition, inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.

Remember, we talked about hitting the finish line, going your fastest. Now, not physically. His body is wasting away. But inwardly, he's being renewed day by day.

And that should be encouraging to us that as we grow older and our body is wasting away, it doesn't mean that our spirit has to be on the same plane as our bodies, that our bodies can be going down and our spirits can be going up, renewed day by day while our body is daily wasting away.

[14:06] That's what Isaiah refers to, that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. Every day, the old person with his physical ailments can have his inner man, his inner being renewed in strength.

This is why they can still bear fruit in old age, Psalm 92. And so he says in verse 17, for our light and momentary troubles, which were part of this physical body wasting away, are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. I suggest that that's how Paul was renewed day by day on his inner man. He kept focusing the eye of faith not on what was seen. What he saw was a body wasting away. But on what was unseen. A new heaven and a new earth and a new resurrection body that God's going to give him one day.

And the glory that will be his when he sees Christ face to face. That keeps Paul from losing heart as his body is wasting away. He says in another place, our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there.

[15:24] The Lord Jesus Christ, who will, according to his power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies that they may be like his glorious body.

So Paul realized that the cross work of Jesus Christ not only redeemed his soul, but it redeemed his body as well. It bought the purchase.

It purchased the redemption of his body. That's not for this life, but it's coming. And so he thinks not of the things that are seen, but of the things that are coming, the things that are eternal.

One of which is the resurrection of the body, as he just said in verse 14. Johnny Erickson taught it was mentioned. She has a track on heaven.

And you see in that track that she's a lady that's often thinking about heaven. And the things that are unseen that are true now and that will be true when she meets her Lord.

[16:27] So our bodies are weakening. Our souls need to be strengthening day by day. And we do that by fixing on the unseen, our unseen Christ, fellowship with him, feeding on what's coming.

But part of the real trial of losing our physical capacities is that we lose our independence along with it. And that was mentioned the first lesson when we were talking about that.

We may lose our ability to drive. We may lose our ability to stay in our own home and to take care of ourselves. All sorts of things. Let me just say, by the way of driving, I remember a dear elderly sister who wanted to take Gordon and Shirley Hawkins out to eat when they were here.

And she picked them up at our home and brought them back. And when they came back, Gordon's eyes were as big as saucers. And he says, that's an accident waiting to happen there.

And he told us how that she had come around the corner and her mirror, he's sitting there in the passenger side and the mirror clips the mailbox off. And he's just shaking, you know.

[17:41] And all that to say, if your kids tell you you're getting too old to drive, believe them. Don't add to your trial of old age the conscience of having caused harm to another person in an accident or even having taken a life.

But these things are part of the trial of growing old, losing this independence. Remember now there are two sides to every trial. What are they?

Temptation from the devil. A trial from God, a testing of our faith from God. OK, and in each trial, we have a response to God, which is to do what?

OK, be faithful. Let me let me give you a reference. James 4, 7. There's a reference to what we do to God and what we do to the devil.

Submit to God. Resist the devil. So in every trial, there's an agenda. God's got his agenda. And we're to submit to his agenda. The devil has his agenda to get us to sin.

[18:47] And we're to resist his and say no to him. OK, so here's the trial. I'm losing my dependence, my independence, because of my physical and mental decay and wasting away.

Well, I am to submit myself to God. That means to put myself under him. My will under his will. And it seems to me that there's just a whole lot of submitting to be done in old age.

A whole lot of putting my will under his will. When we start to hit these trials of old age, there is his will of command.

I must always put myself under his will of command. But there's also his will of providence. And I must put myself under his will of providence. When younger, perhaps we struggle more with submitting to his will of command.

We want to do this and this and his command says no. And we submit to his will of command. I think when we get older, we have a harder time of submitting to his will of providence. Bowing to circumstances that I don't like one bit, but that I can't change.

[19:58] It's his will of providence. And I need to submit. So there's plenty of opportunity in old age to say with Jesus, not my will, but yours be done.

That's submission. That's what Jesus did, wasn't it? Jim Elliott writes, and shall I pray thee change thy will, my father, until it be according unto mind?

No, that never shall be. Rather, I pray thee, blend my human will with thine. And so we see Christ in the garden praying, not my will, but yours be done.

That's submitting to God. Turn to Hebrews chapter 4, where we see this is stated about our Savior. Hebrews 5 and verse 7.

Where we read, during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverent what?

[21:03] Submission. Now, he was heard in his prayer to be saved from death because of his reverent submission.

You know, he was saved from death. Some people read this and say, well, God didn't answer his prayer because he died on the cross. But that's not the point. He was saved from death.

He was raised from death, wasn't he? He was not allowed. God did not allow his body to see corruption in the grave. And so his prayer was answered.

He was saved from death in his resurrection. And why? Because of his reverent submission.

Because he said, Father, I see that this cup cannot pass without my drinking it.

So not my will, but yours be done. And he submitted to it. And because of his reverent submission, God answered his prayer and saved him from death. Because he said, into your hands I commit my spirit.

[22:06] He submitted to his father in the sweet surrender in his death. And so verse 8 says, although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

So all during his life he's learning obedience. How? By the things that he suffered. And he had to submit to his father. And he submits to this hassle and that problem and this irritation.

And all lifelong Jesus is submitting. So that when he comes to his big trial, his biggest trial, he reverently submits to his father.

And I would suggest that all our lifelong we are learning to submit to our father. So that as we come to our biggest trials that face us in old age, we will be ready to reverently submit to the Lord.

Archibald Alexander says that these passive virtues, like submission and patience, are more difficult than active virtues. And he says God is perhaps more honored by quiet submission to his will under sufferings than by the greatest achievements of zeal and exertion.

[23:21] So we think, wow, I can't serve God like I used to. Well, now, wait a minute. Perhaps God gets as much honor in his work being displayed by your sweet submission to his will in suffering, in physical problems that you're facing.

Remember Job and his physical problems? And God was highly honored. Satan, have you seen him? Have you seen my servant, Job? Even after you've afflicted him, he still blesses me.

We see something of the way God is highly honored by quiet submission to his will. Job had problems after that. But at least in that picture, we see God's pleasure and his delight in the sweet submission of his servants under suffering.

Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish Puritan pastor. And because he believed that Jesus Christ was the head of the church and not the King of England, he was persecuted. And in midlife, he was taken out of his pulpit at Anwath and put in a prison in Aberdeen.

In old age, he was imprisoned again for many years. And he was summoned to appear before Parliament on a charge of treason. He was too ill to make the journey. And so he died in prison awaiting trial.

[24:37] But during his earlier imprisonment, we have many of his letters that have been published. And here he is in his letter sharing this trial of being taken out of active ministry and being stuck away, cooped up in a prison where he's not able to do anything.

But he says, God was teaching me important lessons there. And one of the things I've learned, he said, was submission to God's providence. At first, he shares how he really complained and chafed against God for putting him in prison.

He says, quote, I, like a fool, carved a providence for my own ease, to die in my nest and to sleep still till my gray hairs and to lie on the sunny side of the mountain in my ministry there at Anwath.

But now I dare not speak one word against the all-seeing and ever watchful providence of my Lord. I see that God has the whole world on his wheels and casts it as a potter doth a vessel on the wheel.

I resolve to wait till I see what my Lord Jesus will do with me. And so he had come to submit himself to this providence. And the Lord did wonderful things for him.

[25:54] We're still reading his letters and people's lives are still being challenged by the things that he wrote while in prison. God makes no mistakes when he's pulled us aside from active labors and we're laid up.

We need to resist the devil. What's the devil want you to do when you're physically shot in old age? Complain? Grumble?

Give up? Do nothing? Resist the devil and submit to God. Now all this loss of independence means as well that you're becoming dependent upon other people.

And this is especially difficult for can-do kind of people who've always been able to do for themselves. And you don't want to be a burden or an inconvenience to anyone.

But did you know that there's something worse than being a burden to someone? There really is. Something worse than you being a burden to someone. What is it? Well, how about refusing to let them serve you?

[26:59] Refusing to let them serve you. Wasn't it Peter, who has the Lord Jesus, took the towel in the basin and was coming around serving his disciples? Wasn't it Peter who said, Lord, you will never wash my feet?

I refuse to have you serve me. And Jesus says, well, if you don't, then you have no part in me. Oh, then not just my feet, everything, Peter said. But he would not be served.

He would not have his Lord wash his feet. What's the reason we have such difficulty being in a position of needing help? Pride.

Isn't that true? Self-sufficient pride is often the thing at bottom that we want to do for ourselves. Isn't that something we see with the youngest of children? You and your grandchildren now perhaps are seeing that.

Do myself, Grandpa. I will do this myself. And it's that pride to want to do for ourselves that as we get older, we come back in that same trial now.

[27:58] We're not able to do for ourselves, and yet we want to do for ourselves. And we fight the same battle. So we need to learn to view the disabilities of old age as opportunities to grow in humility.

Remember, the devil's temptation is pride, self-sufficient pride. God's test is will she learn humility as well as submission?

Christ-like humility. Now, some of you have cared for elderly parents who have needed you. Some of you are still doing it. What have you learned from the experience that ought to help prepare you and the rest of us for how we ought to act when the shoe's on the other foot?

And we're now the one in need, and our family is seeking to help us. What have you learned from being in the servant side of the elderly that should help us know how to face it?

Yes. What do you mean by that? Okay. All right. So you've seen what they're going through, and you yourself are learning how difficult that will be.

[29:07] What else have you learned? Yes, there. What else have you learned from doing it? Well, that's what I'm wanting to know. Read that list to me. What do you not want to do? What do you want to do in old age that you learned from that experience?

Don't give me the whole list. Give me one. Okay. Can you read your own handwriting, Mom? So you write down.

It's planning, isn't it? It's what we do with a will, and we need to think of it in other ways. How do I want to be treated in old age? Have you thought about that? Have you talked to your children about that?

Wouldn't it be a tremendous weight off of their backs if you had a statement when you were still in good mind? You said, this is how I want to be treated.

And that takes off a tremendous burden. Learn from that. Good. What else? Eileen and Tom.

Okay? Again, that's what I think we're seeing.

[30:09] Jesus learned obedience by the things he suffered. In his experience, every time he showed godly attitudes, you see, he was preparing himself for the future and the more difficult challenges.

And Eileen is saying, I've seen it's difficult to demonstrate godly attitudes in old age. I need to be doing that today, developing those habits, that in old age I'll be doing that.

Tom? Yeah. It's too late, though, for that, isn't it, in old age? So that's one of the things you can regret that you didn't have any more. But you see the benefits of children in old age.

All right? Dave? Good. Good. Billy? Okay. So you are training your children now to treat you in old age as you are treating your elderly parents.

Okay? Good. There? So you have the issue of Alzheimer's, dementia, medications, all that to weigh out with regard to behaviors.

[31:15] There's responsibility of them. All right? So I find it interesting, I mean, it's just part of the way God did it, that before we get in that position, we are in the position of ministering to the elderly.

And I think it ought to be a time of learning and taking notes, as it's been said. And yes, while you're still able to grow in grace and to make preparations to do so.

But we want our parents to accept our help, don't we? Wouldn't we be hurt if our parents said, no, I don't want to be a burden to you.

I don't want you doing that for me. When we know that they need it. So we need to be prepared as well to receive the help of our children and other people.

It's noon in John chapter 4 and Jesus is hot and he's tired and he's thirsty as he sits on the well of Sychar. Now he's not old, but the principle is there.

[32:20] He's not too proud to let a woman of ill reputation from Samaria meet one of his needs. Not only to meet that need, but he's humble enough to even ask her to meet it.

He asks her for water. He's thirsty and he has nothing with which to draw. He asks for help. That became an opening door to the conversion of this woman.

But John chapter 19, he's now on the cross. And he realizes he needs help caring for his mother. He's not able to care for his mother like he ought.

Because he's going to die and be gone. So John, behold your mother. And woman, behold your son. He's able to impress John to help.

Ask for help. This is our Savior. Are you humble enough? Are you like Jesus enough to ask for help? You see, it wars against this self-sufficient pride.

[33:20] Old age then is a call to battle our pride. And to grow in humility. To resist the devil's temptations to pride. And to submit ourselves humbly to the Lord.

And it's also opportunities for others to grow in service. And experience the greater joy of giving. Don't rob your family of that joy. Jesus said, it's better to give.

Yes, it's better to give than to receive. Don't rob your kids of the joy of giving. Giving themselves to you. 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 4. There's a list there of qualifications for widows that are to be cared for by the church.

But they're not to be cared for by the church if they have their own family to care for them. And we have this statement. 1 Timothy 5, 4. If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn, first of all, to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family.

And so repaying their parents and grandparents. For this is pleasing to God. Now there's at least three things here that you don't want to rob your children of.

[34:28] Number one is the opportunity to put their religion into practice. Because they don't have true religion if they're not caring for their family. And so that's part of true religion. Don't block that.

Secondly, to take care of you in your old age is to repay you for your loving service to them when they were younger and dependent upon you. Don't rob them of that opportunity to repay you.

A labor of gratitude for what you did for them when they needed you. Or when you needed them. You know what I mean.

And lastly, don't rob them of the joy of pleasing God. Because this is pleasing to the Lord. To take care of your parents. Have you noticed how mutual interdependence is part of God's plan for us on the planet?

Young children are dependent upon parents. Older parents are dependent upon their children. What other spheres has God built this interdependence into?

[35:38] I'm sorry? Okay, we need to depend on Him. That's right. But here life on earth is full of this idea of interdependence. How about marriage? It's not good for the man to be alone.

He can't make it on his own. He needs help. And so God prepares a woman. And so there's this mutual interdependence upon each other. How about the church?

Does anybody in the church have all the gifts so that they can just live them and God? Just me and God? No. The ear needs the foot. And there's this interdependence upon each other.

Why do you think God planned it that way? Why didn't He just give each one of us all that we need? All right. All right. So He does it to teach us humility, doesn't He?

To keep us humble. And so you see when you get old and you get in a place where you are dependent upon others, that's nothing new. You've been dependent on others all your life.

[36:43] You've needed your husband. You've needed your wife. You've needed your mom. You've needed your dad. You've needed your children now. You've needed your church, your brothers and sisters in church.

And so that's the way it is. And God means for us to humbly accept that help. So it's just a different application of the principle of interdependence.

The loss of our independence not only strikes at our pride, it also makes us feel like we're out of control. But you know, the truth is we never really were in control, were we? You're not in control now in good health.

You depend on God for your next breath. So you're not in control. It's just an illusion that we're in control. It's a mirage. We're incapable of doing anything for ourselves.

Jesus says, apart from me, you can do nothing. James says, you can't even live tomorrow. So we need to come back to those things that are unseen, those truths that are there, that I am always dependent.

[37 : 48] I am no more dependent in old age than I am when I came into this world. And every step along the way, I might have felt like I was self-dependent. In some ways, physically, yes, we could argue for that.

But really, strip it all down. What is your health? But a gift of God that he gives breath at a time, heartbeat at a time. You're dependent. And so we need to learn that we're not in control.

We don't have everything under our... We're not God. That's what we're learning, isn't it? That's what we're saying. We're not God. And so I need to live by faith in God.

We sing, I need thee. Oh, I need thee. Every hour, I need thee. That's the reality that we live with.

And so if we're learning to live that way day by day now, as we come closer to the finish line and we spend those last days, it will be, I need thee every hour.

And sometimes, Lord, you bring me your help directly. Other times, you bring it through a brother, a sister, a son, a daughter, church member. Help me to be humble enough to accept it however you bring it.

[38 : 56] Old age, full of temptations from the devil and wonderful opportunities for faith to grow, the relationship with our Savior to grow. May the Lord help us to resist the devil and to submit ourselves to God.