

TRANSITIONS of LIFE: Healthy Aging, Retirement & the Spiritual Journey

Dr. Paul Pearce, FBC Seniors Luncheon/ April 1, 2022

INTRODUCTION

...we are anxious that you keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, so that you will get your full reward. Then knowing what lies ahead of you, you won't become bored being a Christian, nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience. Hebrews 6:11-12/LB

We are in the midst of an unprecedented time of change which will be with us for the next 25-30 years. As many of us enter the 55(+/-) older adult stage of life, we will need to focus on discerning how we can find meaningful and kingdom centred vocational pursuits beyond the roles which have defined our daily activities and ministries. The **"full" reward** implies both a deepening awareness of all that God's grace can provide as we experience the changes of aging and the promise for us to live productively into the fullness of the years given to us. (Our **"space of grace"**)

Our lives in the later years must be understood and lived as a continuation of the journeys of meaning and purpose beyond ourselves to remain vital and authentic. We will need to discern how to maintain or recover a focus/passion for living through the varied transitions and consequent diminishments of aging. To stay engaged with life and of value to younger generations, we will need to be a part of a vital intergenerational community of faith where both young and old can mutually embrace the benefits of sharing life together. The scriptures and church history have many wonderful examples of intergenerational ministries to continue to become **maturing adults in our spiritual journeys with Jesus**. (Paul & Timothy)

You've been raised on the Message of the faith and have followed sound teaching. Now pass on this counsel to the Christians there, and you'll be a good servant of Jesus. Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God – no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both for today and forever. You can count on this. Take it to heart. This is why we've thrown ourselves into this venture so totally. We're banking on the living God, Saviour of all men and women, especially believers.

*Get the word out. Teach all these things. **And don't let anyone put you down because you are young.** Teach believers with your life: by word, by demeanour, by love, by faith, by integrity. Stay at your post reading Scripture, giving counsel, teaching. And the special gift of ministry you were given when the leaders of the church laid hands on you and prayed – keep that dusted off and in use.*

Cultivate these things. Immerse yourself in them. The people will all see you mature right before their eyes! Keep a firm grasp on both character and your teaching. Don't be diverted. Just keep at it. Both you and those who hear you will experience salvation. (2 Timothy 4: 11-16/ The Message)

FOUNDATIONAL FACTORS FOR HEALTHY AGING, SPIRITUAL FORMATION and MATURATION

As we age, we will need to continue to see each new season as an extension of all that has gone before and make adjustments to the factors contributing to healthy aging.

The **FACTORS** regularly referenced to consider are: (See the blog at www.chatcanada.org for a more developed article entitled **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING to HEALTHY AGING**) and a 10 session video series on **REFRAMING RETIREMENT and the SPIRITUAL JOURNEY** along with a study guide.

(i) **THE SPIRITUAL FACTOR** – What do we believe is important and life-giving?

(ii) **THE VOCATIONAL FACTOR**- How do we maintain or discover meaningful activities and feel that we are making a contribution?

(iii) **THE SOCIAL FACTOR** – Who are (will be) our primary care partners (providing care/receiving care)? – family; friends; church; government agencies; private/social enterprise

(iv) **THE WELLNESS FACTOR** – What changes are needed to assure that we will be good stewards of our health and wellness (physically, psychologically, mentally)?

(v) **THE RESOURCES FACTOR** – What resources do we bring to this time of life that we can access and develop - (life story, skills, relationships, interests/hobbies, financial)?

FOUNDATIONAL IDEALS FOR HEALTHY AGING, SPIRITUAL FORMATION and MATURATION

We will need to remind ourselves regularly of our ideals that influence these factors as we face the uncertainties and stresses of life's many transitions and aging. Some suggestions for **IDEALS** to inform an approach to dealing with change and healthy aging include:

(i) **ACCEPTANCE** – Acknowledge the realities of changes as we transition through the varied seasons of life, aging and eventually dying. We need to avoid the cultural obsessions with denial. (*Living or dying we follow the Lord. Either way we are his.* – Paul Rom.14:8/LB) – adopt the journey/pilgrimage metaphors (others?) Does acceptance imply being passive and disengaged? How can we understand aging and entering the later years of life as the most important part of the pilgrimage?

(ii) **SECURITY** – Allow personal loss and diminishment, which come with every major life transition to be a way to grow into a fresh understanding of grace and Christ's presence (*My grace is enough: it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.* - 2 Corinthians 12:9/Message) - What kind of loss or diminishment do we (you) fear the most? How can we handle insecurities when they emerge?

(iii) **INTEGRITY** – Allow Christ to challenge and change your inner life as you realign priorities and plans. (*My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have a good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine", but is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going back on that.* – Galatians 2:19-20/Message) - What are the fears, emotions or circumstances which hinder us from experiencing a more satisfying and Christ-centred life?

(iv)**COMMUNITY** – Seek and embrace others (family; friends; church; community service) into a social network of shared living and support. (*All of you together are the one body of Christ and each of you is a separate and necessary part of it.* – 1 Corinthians 12:27/LB) – Whom do we share our lives with when we experience difficulties or good times? What kind of community would you choose to live out the final years of your life?

(v)**SPIRITUAL VITALITY** - Commit to a life rhythm of prayer, contemplation, discernment and service. Find ways to experience these spiritual disciplines and practices both privately and in community with others. (*Be cheerful no matter what: pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. Don't suppress the Spirit, and don't stifle those who have a word from the Master.* – 1 Thessalonians 5:16/Message) – Does solitude and meditation come easy for us today? Why/Why not? How can we help one another better to remain spiritually vital?

(vi)**VERSATILITY** - Respond to transitions which may bring either times of enhancement or diminishment, suffering and loss with a hopeful attitude of grace, openness and discernment. (cf. Paul's response of attitude to hardship and an unresolved physical problem when he realized that God's grace is sufficient to meet his need. – *Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size – abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.* - 2 Corinthians 12: (b-10/Message) – Do we think in today's culture that we should interpret suffering as a way to draw closer to God? Why/Why not? What are the ways you have found to be helpful in facing difficult times and personal loss? How do you handle times of promotion or enhancement?

(vii)**LEGACY**- Anticipate how you want to be remembered and let this inform your daily living and relationships. (*The good leave an inheritance to their children's children.* – Proverbs 13:22/NIV) – Our experience with others will always leave a remembrance of us. The later years of life especially bless us with a time of grace to complete in our selves what has been neglected through the years. To what do you feel you need to turn your attention? What might you give to someone as legacy with the remainder of your years (e.g. time, companionship, good times of mutually enjoying a shared experience, others?)?

The above **IDEALS** emerged through reading and adapting the book:

PILGRIMAGE into the Last Third of Life (Thibault & Morgan; Upper Room Books, 2012)

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be also where I am. You know the way to the place I am going. - Jesus

REFRAMING RETIREMENT and the SPIRITUAL JOURNEY VIDEOS

People of faith need a framework to understand retirement. There is a common term used in our culture regarding the wave of unprecedented growth of people over 55: "*the grey tsunami*". But tsunamis are destructive and leave devastation in their wake. Rather, we need to be like a surfer, seeing this wave as an opportunity to experience and embrace. There is a vacuum being felt by many in the cultural responses to retirement in addressing the longing for purposeful living and an assurance of hope for the future. So, how should we approach this time of challenge and opportunity as individuals and churches? This 10 episode video series with a study guide for individual and group learning helps us explore the questions and issues for beginning to respond and live into the spiritual journey with Jesus and others.

The videos can be reviewed at the CHATCANADA website:
www.chatcanada.org .

The videos including a study guide for each session can be reviewed at the CAREY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE website under the "Carey Church Resources" tab: [www.https://carey-edu.ca/](https://carey-edu.ca/) .

Youth may be admired for vigor, but gray hair gives prestige to old age.
Proverbs 20:29 (The Message)