

# The Seriously Misleading “As we age . . .” Myth

Using two important examples for guidance, we can see that aging, despite common opinions otherwise, is a minor part of life-long maturity development or later-life physical decline. Instead, appropriate activity is by far the major factor in advances just as passivity ensures inevitable declines. As a result, we are not victims of aging, but beneficiaries IF we use our thought and time wisely for improvement.

While aging generally has negative connotations, in some cases we over-value aging, as in, for example, maturing. There are many people who never mature no matter how long they live. Or they don't mature in certain ways. Instead, using another example, they may keep repeating the same foolish financial mistakes over and over so that their immaturity in financial matters become even more ingrained. Yes, their incomes may go up over time, but in continuing bad habits they will remain enslaved to money rather than subjugating money to their benefit. Make no mistake, one or the other will be the master and the other their slave! And without doubt (against conventional thinking), it is worse to be immature and dominated by money at a high income or asset level than a low-income level – ask anyone who has lost significant assets or a high-paying job they cannot replace!

Or, in the public arena we see one politician or celebrity after another who seemingly hasn't matured beyond age 16 in relating to the opposite sex; their immaturity, even though becoming more common, is not normal!

## Adding God and His Grace to the Mix?

For the many possible commonplace “as we age” issues, most people do not have the option of adding God and His Grace to the aging equation because they have not “entered into” Christ. For until becoming a “full-fledged” Christian, God's Grace will be missing because Grace and self-will, self-interest, self-absorption . . . (selfishness in its various forms) are incompatible, what Grace offers is neutralized by a pull-away and back to self.

Yes, there is the reality of what is termed “common grace,” the benefits of place of birth or current living, genetics, etc., but God's special and personal Grace is not at the fingertips and disposal of those holding onto the supposed “securities” of the world because the effect of doing so is rejecting Christ.

We can, and often do, mistakenly consider rejection as an active “push back,” but more commonly it is the failure to actively seek and accept offered help. Many people consider themselves “good” Christians because they cannot remember having rejected Christ. But neither can they remember actively seeking Him in the possible ways of “finding” Him: serious *Bible* reading being the most notable and obvious, manifested by hope, a searching of His Word with a real expectation and belief that, through His Word, God will speak to them, show them how they must change and give them the power to make the necessary hard changes (in spite of the fact that the “necessary hard,” humanly impossible, changes are minor compared to God's promised blessings for doing so).

Everyone who has ever attended church or attempted to read the *Bible* will be without excuse of “not knowing” because, early in the *New Testament*, Jesus explains this passivity to Him and His Word, hope and belief in Him (and its consequences):

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” Mt 12:30-31

In other words, the greatest possible blessing that “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven” is forfeited in much the same way as Adam and Eve were given a single command as a basis for life in paradise and lost it in one act of rebellion. Our analogous test? We are surely lost if we even passively fail Christ’s initial, first public words, again in *Matthew*, for passively failing is active failure:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” *Mt 4:17*

God, His Grace, promises, blessings, warnings . . . are active. Faith likewise is active, not passive. Many have been falsely told or taught that we can passively repent (a concept of not “believing” we have to **do** anything different, but only passively “accept” Christ – whatever that means). This is expressly stated as foolish a thousand times in the *Bible*!

“As we age . . .” by Grace

In short, authentic Christians are anything but passive in their faith as all are indwelt with a very active and on-going Holy Spirit at the time of their new birth. The Holy Spirit is responsible for (in the words of *Psalms 23*) making us, leading us, restoring us, guiding us, being with us, preparing us, anointing us through His goodness and love. He matures us over time in His “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” *Galatians 5:22-23* All active verbs!

It is true that, “as we age,” if we remain passive to God the physical, mental and other areas of life will decline more and more until we die and ALL is lost. If, on the other hand, we look ahead, consider, seek, begin to see the real contrasts between the hopelessness of even the best the world has to offer, fumble around in our searching, ask God (even though we may have only a sliver of hope He is “there” or will help) . . . and then somehow (later recognized as God’s Grace) accept, rather than reject, Christ we are promised:

Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. *Mt 19:29*

Then, under the ever-present guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will seek God for the appropriate disciplines (and the greater challenge of being able to do them) to overcome, rather than wallow in, the on-going inevitable and various trials of life everyone faces.

## Better Understanding Grace So We Don’t Miss It

The common mistaken notion about Grace is that, if God is going to give us Grace, it means He will do something for us instead of making us do it. Yet, in almost all cases, Grace is God’s gift of His power, working through us, to do what we otherwise cannot do on our own – Grace is not from passivity to passivity, but from inactivity to actively accomplishing something He prepared in advance for us to do FOR OUR OWN GOOD. “Well, I COULD exercise if I really wanted to,” many sedentary people will say, “other people do, so it can’t be impossible.”

1. Then why not do it? For it is the best possible temporal investment we can make with our time.
2. As said earlier, there are people that have unusual natural abilities, in the form of common grace, all of us do not possess. Probably 10% of people can develop and maintain a lasting exercise discipline. For everyone else, while not physically impossible, it is a practical impossibility – they are NOT going to do it apart from God’s Grace.

Christians don’t have better outcomes than non-Christians by continuing in self-destructive activities or passivity as compared to actively doing right. When Christians sin, they suffer the natural consequences like the non-Christian, at least enough to get them to repent as Jesus says His continuing training of us intends. We are not maturing if we are not repenting, actively repenting.

The opportunities to, and benefits of, repenting never end. In fact, repentance gets harder and harder as we make progress and are drawn back to our natural desire to passivity and its supposed ease and comfort. The Good News? Harder repentance actually becomes easier because of the Grace we have and are being given (as long as we take it) to develop appropriate disciplines to effect and maintain successful repentance; disciplines make the harder tasks of on-going maturing actually easier.

But we all know this, if in no other way than by seeing a child, at some magic point, cresting the hill of a discipline to brush their teeth – one moment brushing their teeth is seemingly traumatic and an ordeal and then a change (not perfect, but moving towards it) of a habit formed and the seeming effort decreased. We are all children, immature in certain ways, and God is working on His children to mature them through repentances of various types and developing appropriate disciplines to maintain and enhance these repentances. Then on to the next, good for us, repentances.

This is maturing as a Christian, by definition one who is a Grace receiver and user:

- from learning the hard way as the negative consequences of sin and passivity become all too evident and unbearable, to
- listening and accepting as we are told, but having to be told each time, to
- one who actively seeks and looks for Grace (“Ask and it will be given to you” Jesus promises), looking ahead and around to see possibilities for improvement and the associated repentance to “do” the appropriate repentance.

God is a very proud Father at each step in this maturing process!

Maturing and growing in Christ and His Grace of disciplines not only deepens with practice (beyond the “spiritual,” what we initially thought God was interested in), but also widens to all key areas of life (Mental, Physical, Emotional, Relational, Work, Rest, Financial, Cleaning & Upkeep, Recreation & Entertainment and Personal Grooming & Hygiene) as we begin to understand improvements are synergistic to over-all better (or worse in the case of unresolved poor activities or passivity) so that we will begin to see the most surprising repentance Grace offers and expectations of God as we mature. For God has a lot of potential improvements to work for in each of His children – enough to last at least our full lifetime! And unlike so many professing Christians today, the great Apostle Paul understood the life-long challenge of faith. For as he wrote very late in his life:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. <sup>Phil 3:10-15</sup>

And this is certainly a process, we are told, that begins and continues throughout life with on-going (impossible without Grace) repentance:

Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change [repent] and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” <sup>Mt 18:3</sup>

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” <sup>Mt 4:17</sup>

For 2,000 years, Jesus has been preaching, and offering His Grace to, repent – this is a key and essential sign of authentic Christianity.

So, in summary, we can largely, if not totally, control the “as we age” manifestations of life through appropriate activities, most of which are only Grace-based and, therefore, limited to authentic Christians. “But I know, everyone does, people who do great things and don’t believe in God - so, it seems to me it is more a factor of personal abilities, hard work (haven’t we also heard, and likely told others, ‘You can do anything you want if you work at it hard enough!’) . . .” many people think and may say.

Disregarding the obvious fallacy of the common, shallow and obvious error that “We can do anything we want if we work at it hard enough!,” there are examples of great athletes, those who become notable public figures, some who seem optimistic, financially VERY well off, those that appear extraordinarily happy . . . without professing any need of or help from God. But if we scratch just a little below the surface we typically find they are “one-or two-trick ponies” with other glaring issues and immaturities like those achieving the greatest public notoriety, the highest achievements or being very rich, those seemingly having everything . . . with their private lives in shambles. And even those in whom we never see any obvious negative issues, we will see, if we wait long enough, the richest, most “beautiful,” smartest, most powerful . . . waste away and die, leaving all they valued behind. For we cannot find the **all-important** eternal life without the special and personal saving Grace of Christ - “Where can I find it?” one may ask.

Start reading the *New Testament*:

- In the personal, present-tense and practical manner for which God designed and wrote it FOR HIS FOLLOWERS. Forget all the “spiritual” and theoretical “interpretation” mumbo jumbo you might have heard; the *Bible* is God’s practical book to show us His many promises and warnings for everyday life leading to eternal life. If you do not understand something don’t worry about it now, keep reading and many questions will be answered in reading or in living.
- Pray what you read and ask God to reveal His truth to you – it will not take long to find His offered Grace.
- Try to find a church that appears serious about the *Bible*, Christ, the Holy Spirit . . . eternal life! But don’t become demoralized if you have a hard time in this regard; keep looking (a good church will help in spiritual maturity), understanding God can and will give every Christian Grace even if (no, even more! if) they are in a poor church (and most, even poor, churches have a number of authentic Christians that will bless us and whom we can bless).

The dangerous “As we age . . .” myth? That, as we age, decline and worse are inevitable. And this is true with the sole exception of those on their way to the Eternal Celestial City! And the *Bible* gives us a way to see if we are aging well and productively or poorly and in vain – take the test, God will help and show us:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>2Co 13:5</sup>

Life is a great one-time test for everyone.  
Our challenge: Seek and accept God’s Grace to  
pass, not fail, this great test!