



# Seven Essentials for Finishing Well

*“Fulfilling God’s Plan for Our Aging Years”*

By Hal Habecker, DMin  
a Discipleship Project for

**FINISHINGWELL**  
MINISTRIES  
[www.finishingwellministries.org](http://www.finishingwellministries.org)



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**by Hal Habecker**

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# **FINISHING WELL** MINISTRIES

***FWM aims to encourage every retired Christian and every Christian thinking about retirement to “fulfill God’s plan and purposes for our aging years.”***

**FWM** is an important initiative that aims to change the narrative of aging people in life along with our churches and communities. We see the presence of aging followers of Christ as a growing convoy/peloton of saints purposing to make a greater difference for Christ throughout their aging years. That legacy will strengthen the work of Christ for future generations.

God has a mission for us as we age. The mission of FWM is to strengthen the ways Christians **think** about and **live** in retirement. Culturally speaking, retirement means one stops working at a certain age and then begins receiving Social Security. Most seem to understand that this new season means that one steps back, embraces a quieter life, certainly more leisurely pace of life, investing more time with family, travel at will, and/or see the world. At that point life changes. Purpose changes. But it is precisely at this point we must ask, what is our purpose now?

As in all of life, we would look to the Scriptures for guidance at this point. **Thinking biblically we discover that God’s plan and purposes for His people do not change at the age of retirement.** As followers of Christ, we are called to keep growing spiritually, to keep being conformed to the image of Christ, to keep building the church, to keep sharing the Gospel, to keep on being ambassadors for Christ, to keep using our giftedness, to keep being filled with the Spirit, and to keep on making disciples in **every one** of our retirement years. Mobilizing seniors throughout their retirement years for His purposes is the purpose for Finishing Well Ministries and for the purpose of this discipleship project.

## **How to Use This Project**

To encourage this biblical mindset in retirement is the purpose of this discipleship project. **FWM** has developed this video series/workbook to focus on seven (7) essentials in life that will help us live well and finish well. It is particularly designed with retired and aging people in mind. We believe God has an incredible mission for us as we age. We have a compelling mission. The workbook follows the video series. The two are designed for personal use or small group use. We encourage its use as a church educational elective, in a Sunday School group, a home group, or a Bible study group (men, women, or couples).

We also believe that this curriculum can be helpful for those beginning to think about retirement. Thinking through these important issues will give this age group a “head start” in thinking about how God views the value of the retirement season of life.

Some day in the not-to-far-distant-future, all Christians, particularly aging Christians, will contemplate the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4.6-8. Paul teaches the importance of living life with eternity in view.

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Stephen R. Covey, author of his classic work, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, notes the importance of this point in his second habit - "Begin with the End in Mind." Covey invites you to imagine your funeral. He asks you to think how you would like your loved ones to remember you, what you would like them to acknowledge as your achievements, and to consider what a difference you made in their lives. Engaging in this thought experiment helps you identify some of your key values that should underpin your behavior.

That's called living with the end in view. Life goes all too fast. Let's purpose to finish well so that our life, with the Apostle Paul, will bear witness to our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12.1,2). To live that way is the purpose of this video series and workbook.

Consider these words. Dr. J. I. Packer (1926–2020) said it this way, **"Runners in a distance race... always try to keep something in reserve for a final sprint. And my contention is that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out. The final sprint, so I urge, should be a sprint indeed"** (Finishing Our Course with Joy, pp. 21,22).



*Note: All Scriptural references are from the NASB Updated Version of the Bible (1995). For clarity, we have also italicized all Scripture quotes. @ Copywrite by Finishing Well Ministries, 2021.*

# The Focus of This Project

To zero in on the focus of the curriculum on which you are about to embark, consider this verse that puts it in perspective - the value of our aging years.

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2.10).*

The impact of this verse is that God has a purpose and a mission for us. By His grace, we are His creation as believers (Ephesians 2.8,9), and now He has a purpose for us – *even in our aging years.*

- Why did He create the aging years?
- Why has He given us life into these aging years?
- What is His purpose for us in these aging years?
- What is our mission for these aging years?
- What does His workmanship mean for us now, and what are the “works” God has prepared for us during these retirement years that we should live them out?

It is our prayer that God will use the pages that follow to help define and refine the purposes of God for our lives in the best years of our life, so that the prayer of Moses can be realized in our lives just as God answered his prayer in his own life.

*So teach us to number our days,  
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90.12).  
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us;  
And confirm for us the work of our hands;  
Yes, confirm the work of our hands (Psalm 90.17).*

“The best is yet to be!”

## Consider Scripture Throughout This Process

This workbook is rooted in the Word of God. Our goal is that God will use these Scriptures to shape our thinking about how we invest our lives in this all-important season of our lives. Read through each Scripture and ask the following questions. Make notes for yourself. Draw some conclusions as you reflect on each text.

- How does the author of each Scripture think about continued growth?
- What might God want me to know through this Scripture concerning the importance of continual growth?
- There is space below each Scripture to write your own thoughts about what that verse may teach about growth.

## The Seven Essentials Overview



1. We will **GROW** – we will not stay the same. Growth is at the heart of life.
2. We will **CONNECT** – we will not live alone – we will continue to build strong friendships.
3. We will **CARE/LOVE OTHERS** – we will love and be there for others in their needs.
4. We will **INVEST** in generations following us, beginning with our families.
5. We will **BE AVAILABLE** as God calls us to serve others.
6. We will **PLAN AHEAD** for when we are gone.
7. We will **PLAN AHEAD** for heaven.

**Welcome to this discipleship project from Finishing Well Ministries. We'd like to suggest the following thoughts to engage this series.**

- Use this project as your own personal growth project.
- Work on it as a group project.
- Make it a Sunday School series, a home group, or use it as a small group anywhere.
- For any of the above, the best practice might be to watch the video and do the homework by yourself or with your spouse before you meet as a group. Then work through the project as a group, discussing the verses and the ideas as a group.

Our prayer would be that every church community consider this project as a way of encouraging retiring persons in their congregation. It is our conviction that churches in general spend far too little time encouraging retiring and retired communities in maximizing their impact of their best years for the cause of Christ.

**So let's launch ahead.**

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Grow old along 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 planned,  
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"  
*Robert Browning (the first stanza of "Rabbi Ben Ezra")*

# 1. We Will GROW – we will not stay the same.



## Introducing the Concept of Growth

We begin with growth. Growth is at the core of life. God calls us to keep growing - even in our aging years.

*“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life”* (Proverbs 4.23). Growth comes from the heart. How is your heart growing? How are you growing? Does this ever stop?

We always want to grow – God means for us to grow in every way. Jesus grew (Luke 2.52). *“He learned obedience from the things which He suffered”* (Hebrews 5.8).

God’s desire is to keep growing us into the image of Christ (Romans 8.29).

We must be alert and resist things that grow into our lives through pride and sin because those things grow against the work of God within us.

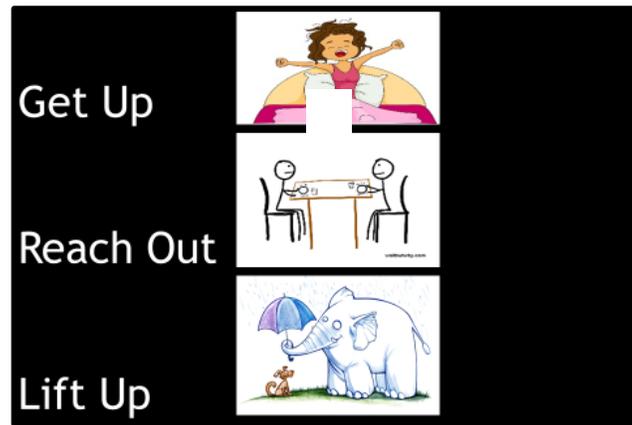
We want those little people in our lives to grow. No parent would want to see their kids or grandkids not grow. Children are born to grow.

We want to grow in understanding what’s expected in our maturity process in life. Are we growing in wisdom, education, relationships, work, and in the work of life? Are we growing in our relationships, our marriages, our families, or in our community of faith? God wants us to grow.

Having said this, we are surprised that adult education (continued growth) tends to slow and diminish with age. Why is that? Why does the growth curve slow with aging years?

God has designed us to grow. He calls us to keep growing. Our aging years call to us to grow.

This simple graphic captures the idea of getting out of bed each morning with a mission in mind to keep growing.



## Basic Biblical Thoughts for Growing

Disciples of Jesus are learners.

*A pupil is above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his master (Luke 6.40).*

The word “disciple” means “learner.” There is a training process – a growing process for every follower of Christ. The verb form means “to learn.” Each day provides an opportunity to learn and grow. In this aging season of our lives, we have countless opportunities to learn how God is calling us to grow and what He wants us to be in this season of life. Each day is a new day. There is an adage about fishing that says, “You never fish in the same river twice.” The river is always changing. That’s true of life as well. Each day is different than the day before. We ourselves are different. With each new day God keeps giving us the opportunity to grow.

Life is about change. Every day and each new season of life brings change – physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Generally speaking, we resist change as we age. Growing may seem harder as we age. The aging process, however, does not mean that our growth slows. God calls us to grow at every age.

“Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.”

- Leo Tolstoy

**Let’s Begin with the Apostle Paul**

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I **press** (pursue) on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **reaching forward** to what lies ahead, I **press** (pursue) on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.12-14).*

How did Paul want to keep growing? What made him keep thinking ahead?

How old was he when he wrote these verses?

Where was he when he wrote these verses?

Was he enthusiastic about growing in this season/stage of his life?

(Note: The word “press” that Paul uses here means “to flee,” to put to flight” or “persecute,” or “to pursue.” While the word generally carries the idea of a desperate action in a negative situation, here the word is used in a positive sense. Paul is deeply intentional and purposeful about growing in his life – pressing on. There is nothing casual about the action. He is desperate about pursuing and growing in Christ. He is desperate about pursuing the mission Jesus has for him. In your own words write how Paul characterizes his life in these 3 verses.)

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Consider a second verse by the apostle Paul. While there are plenty of potential physical hardships in life as we age, Paul does not see these hardships deterring him from his God-given life mission.

*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is **being renewed day by day**. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4.16-18).*

How does our physical body change as we grow older? List some physical hardships as we age. Yet, what happens to the inner man as the physical body weakens and changes?

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Let’s consider two verses from Paul that speak directly to the truth of being continually conformed to the image of Christ.

In the first verse Paul speaks of being continually conformed to the image of Christ. Our destiny, day by day, is that we are being conformed to the image of Christ. No matter how long we live, God’s desire is that we keep on being transformed - that we keep growing more and more into the image of Christ. How can we keep being conformed to the image of Christ more and more as we age and grow older?

*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to become conformed** to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8.29).*

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This next verse from Paul echoes the above theme of being conformed to the image of Christ.

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3.18).*

What does this transforming process mean at our age? How are we continuing to grow more and more into the image of Christ?

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Jesus Himself calls us to keep learning and growing into Him. This verse is one of my favorite verses about growing more to be like Jesus. What does Jesus teach in this next verse about growing and learning from Him?

*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS**. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11.28-30).*

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What does it mean to “learn” from Jesus? How are we “learning” from Jesus in our retirement years? What is He teaching us through His Holy Spirit?

From his daily devotional series, Alistar Begg comments, “Are we willing to learn and grow from Jesus in every area of our lives? Do you see learning of Jesus as a privilege, and not a burden, to follow His teaching and place ourselves under His authority? Let’s seize every opportunity to learn and grow gospel truth, and may it satisfy our heart’s longings and transform your life day by day.”

In this final verse from the apostle Paul, we see that this growth pattern continues to unfold. Paul finds himself moving and growing towards the finish line just as an athlete moves towards the prize. What is it in Paul's life that compels him forward?

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air (1 Cor 9.24-27).*

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Note that the word "competes" means that the athlete is caught up in the struggle/expending energy to keep moving towards the finish line. Life for Paul was not a "walk in the park" during the season of retirement. Nothing could have been further from the truth. That's why he would say at the end of his life race, "I have finished the course" (2 Timothy 4.7).

The athlete does not stop until the competition is completed. Nor does the Christian who follows Christ.

### **Consider the Apostle Peter**

In his 60s and in his second and final letter to the scattered tribes, Peter is thinking about growth.

*For if these qualities are yours and are **increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins (2 Peter 1.8-9).*

In the previous four verses (5-7), Peter had exhorted his readers to diligently add/grow seven quality traits to the believer's faith. Look at them.

Applying all diligence in our faith, add...

- Moral excellence
- Knowledge
- Self-Control
- Perseverance
- Godliness
- Brotherly kindness
- Love

He then says that if these qualities are **growing** in your faith, you will be neither unless nor unfruitful. Rather, you will be growing and bearing fruit. That should be the goal of every Christian in our years of retirement. We want to keep growing and keep bearing fruit.

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It is of special note to me that the final verse of Peter’s 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle speaks of “growing.” Growing in “*the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” must have been a way of life for him even in his aging and final years.

*But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Peter 3.18).*

How does Peter think about continued growth?

How old was Peter when he penned these verses?

How significant is it that Peter emphasizes the significance of continued GROWTH as the final words of his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter?

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How might God be wanting to use our aging years to keep conforming each of us to the image of Christ? Isn’t consistent growth necessary to becoming more mature in our faith?

**Consider Moses**

Moses, perhaps the oldest of all the Psalm-writers, thinks about the learning and growing process of each day that God entrusts to us. What is it that God wants him/us to learn? What do we think God desires to teach us in our aging years?

*So **teach** (help us learn/grow) us to number our days,  
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90.12).*

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Let's conclude this biblical section with one final verse from the Apostle Paul.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the **future** there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, **will award** to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing* (2 Timothy 4.7-8).

Paul saw the finishing line of his life drawing close. I see him as pointing his life towards his appointed day of standing in the presence of God. I see him growing towards his desired destination in life. How do you see this strategic verse relating to growth, and what ought we to be learning as we near the end of life?

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**Applying These Truths to Life**

I love what John Stott, the late Anglican pastor/scholar, says about needing a healthy appetite to keep growing – even in our aging years.

“There is perhaps no greater secret of progress in Christian living than in healthy, hearty spiritual appetite. Again and again Scripture addresses its promises to the hungry. God 'satisfied him who is thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things' (Psalm 107.9). If we are conscious of slow growth, is the reason that we have a jaded appetite? It is not enough to mourn over past sin; we must also hunger for future righteousness” (Authentic Christianity, # 481, “A Hearty Appetite”).

Do you and I have a healthy appetite about growing? Yes? No? Maybe? Why or why not?

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**Living This Mission in the Midst of Our Culture**

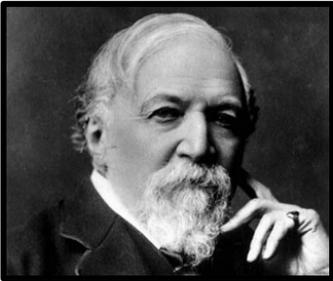
The above Scriptures and the theme of growth seem to go against the drift of our culture. “To retire” literally means “to stop” or “to disengage.” When one “retires,” we stop going to work. Our economic productivity stops. When we “retire” for the day, we usually go to sleep.

When well-known athletes retire from the game, they stop playing and the # they wore may be retired to the rafters or walls of the arena. Therefore, we will resist and reject our culture’s understanding of aging. Most of us grew up in an age-graded culture that essentially says this -

we go to school, then we go to work, and then we retire. **We argue that we go to school our entire lives, we work our entire lives, and, if we are wise, we learn to take respites along the way.**

To the contrary of our cultural pattern, we continue to grow in Christ every day of our lives. We are continually ambitious to keep serving Him. We advocate a different perspective. We as believers will not become conformed to this world of retirement (Romans 12.2), but our views on the retirement season of life ought to be along the lines of Robert Browning and the first stanza of his epic poem, Rabbi Ben Ezra;

Grow old along 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 planned,  
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid."



In all of life, we believe it is very empowering to recognize that we have some control of what we eat, how we choose to exercise, what we believe spiritually, how we exercise our faith, and how socially engaged we are in helping others and living life courageously. We want to keep growing.

We also want to keep growing in becoming more self-aware as persons. Growing in self-awareness is a life-long process. Understanding my giftedness, weaknesses, and personal tendencies is a never-ending growth process. Can you list some areas of your life and relationships in your life in which you sense God is calling you to grow?

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Personal growth is critical for spiritual growth for older people in the church. Approximately 80% of older persons belong to congregations, and their involvement in these congregations helps to buffer many of the negative aspects of aging. The church needs to rigorously encourage these 80% of seniors to keep growing as never before. Even in the church, these seniors may be busy with trips and activities, but the church often falls short of encouraging seniors to make these aging years the most productive years of their lives. Why is this?

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Consider the lament and challenge of the late Dr. Howard G. Hendricks;



“Old age is as important and meaningful a part of God’s perfect will as youth. He is interested in both the waxing and waning of life. Just as potential is locked up in young people, and often never developed, so the full possibilities of old age often remain dormant and die with the person. **The work of God will be greatly enriched when more attention is given to releasing and utilizing this hidden resource. Older people represent the greatest potential resource and labor pool within our churches, though consistently ignored.**

Stanford psychology professor, Dr. Carol Dweck, says this about growth. “She divides the world between learners and non-learners, demonstrating that a fixed mindset will limit your growth while a growth mindset can move you forward.”

### Applying These Truths in Our Lives

One of the things we can do as a group project is to take some time together to think creatively about growing. On the left section of a white board (if a board is present), think aloud about what GROWING means. List your thoughts. Next, on the right side of the white board make a list of some BARRIERS to growth. What keeps you from growing? (We’ll make this simple exercise a pattern concerning each of the *7 Essentials*.)

#### GROWTH

#### BARRIERS


### Now Consider Satan

An important question to consider together is this - How does Satan work through the above barriers to keep us from GROWING?

We must remember the aim and work of our enemy - the devil, Satan himself. He aims to destroy us (1 Peter 5.8). His mission is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10.10). How might he be using these barriers to keep us from growing? The apostle Paul reminds us that we are constantly engaged in a spiritual war with our enemy (Ephesians 6.10-17). If he can keep us from growing, he has a decided advantage in our lives. Think through the above barriers again through the lens of how Satan uses these barriers for his advantage.

*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5.8).*

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (John 10.10).*

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm (Ephesians 6.10-13).*

Satan neither wants us to grow well nor age well. Think out loud or discuss the many ways Satan attempts to fight against the purposes God has for us in our lives.

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**Growing Through Hardships As We Age**

We must add one final word concerning our growth. Perhaps our greatest growth may come through the most difficult of challenges, whatever they may be. Whether those challenges come through aging challenges/hardships, or just the general challenges/hardships of life, let’s grow through them.

Consider the words of James in response to the things (barriers) in life that keep us from growing. How would James’ exhortation make a difference in our hardships as we age?

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that <sup>a</sup>the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1.2-5).*

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We referred to the following verse previously (page 3) with respect to growing but consider it again with respect to **growing through the hardships of aging**. The aging of the body will bring new hardships. The apostle Paul recognizes the need to prepare for this season and put it into perspective.

*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4.16-18).*

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“Embrace the difficult circumstances you find yourself in, even when you feel they will overwhelm you. Allow God to mold you through the events He allows to enter your life. This will make you flexible toward the will of God. The events of life are like a furnace for the heart. All your impurities are melted and your old ways are lost. The intrusions that God sends you will no doubt upset your plans and oppose all that you want. But they will chase you towards God.” (Francois Fenelon, The Seeking Heart, Seed Sowers Publishing, p.14 [Quoted also in The Softer Side of Leadership: Essentials Soft Skills That Transform Leaders and the People They Lead, Eugene Habecker, p.100]).

### **Learning about Hardships from Jesus**

Finally, we must think of Jesus who learned and kept growing through His own difficulties. How can we learn from Jesus and how He encountered His own suffering and hardships?

*But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, **because of the suffering** of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings (Hebrews 2.9-10).*

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*In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He **suffered** (Hebrews 5.7,8).*

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12.1-3).*

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Jesus grew all through His life, even to the very end of His life - His death on the cross. Finishing to the end is our mission. It is the same for us as it was for our Savior. Let's embrace hardship as growing disciples – whatever our age.

Consider the late J.I. Packer, who never stopped growing in his faith despite the challenges of aging in his latter years. At the age of 89 he was no longer able to read, travel, or speak because of his failing eyesight, yet at that time he said in an interview,

“God knows what he is doing, and some good, something for his glory, is going to come out of it. I find it more possible to concentrate on God himself and his plans, purposes, and performance than I used to do. I suppose that all these things have rooted themselves more deeply in my mind and heart. And I trust there's less superficiality than there used to be.”

**Thinking about Our Mission – Is Our Mission Intentional?**

Now, let's try pulling together all the above and think towards our mission in life. Think about “growth” through the following assignment. Do you have a life mission statement? Do you have a purpose in life that will keep you growing? How will you keep growing? If you do not have a life mission statement, the following statement might be appropriate to consider.

“If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there and it doesn't matter how long it takes.” - Author Unknown

Growth/Lifelong Learning – we are always the sum total of what we are becoming. Aging years are critically important for all that we are. God’s desire is that we keep learning/growing about who we are and where we are going. Aging provides the opportunity to live out what we are learning/becoming. We are not “vaulted” (locked up) people. These summary questions might help you in writing a mission/purpose statement for your life now.

- What am I learning and how am I growing in these years?
- Who am I becoming?
- What is my mission? What is my “Why?”
- With all that I’ve had, in light of how I am growing now, and in light of my unique, God given design, what do I believe is my “highest and best” contribution in advancing the cause of Christ on this earth?
- Given my gifts and abilities, what type of activity offers the greatest potential for service to the Lord and others?
- In what direction is God leading me to invest my time, talent and treasure?
- What are the opportunities in my life now?
- Am I learning about myself as I age – increasing self-awareness in all areas of my life?

As an example, here is my own personal mission statement written for this season of my life.

“I am trusting God to use my gifts of encouragement and teaching

- to equip and motivate retiring boomers and those beyond in the prime of their life
- to deepen their love for Jesus, and
- to use the talents and gifts God has given them to make their best contributions throughout the remaining years of their lives.”

**My Mission in My Aging Years**

If you have a life mission statement, write it here. If not, see if you can begin to write one for yourself. Use the above questions to help guide your thinking.

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Share your mission statement with the group.

Consider your church and its ministries to a senior generation. What kinds of activities are taking place to encourage you and the aging community of your congregation to make these years the best growing years of life?

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## For Further Thinking

This concludes our selection of “core Scriptures” challenging us to GROW. Please feel free to add other verses that God may bring to your attention having considered the importance of “growth.”

What other verses come to your mind as you think about growth? Share them with the group.

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If you could thoughtfully combine what we need to grow, much like a greenhouse for Christian growth, what might spur us on to keep growing?

- Bible reading and study
- Reflection
- Accountability
- A mentor
- Space for questions
- Self-discovery

**What steps of faith might be needed to keep you on a strong growth path?**

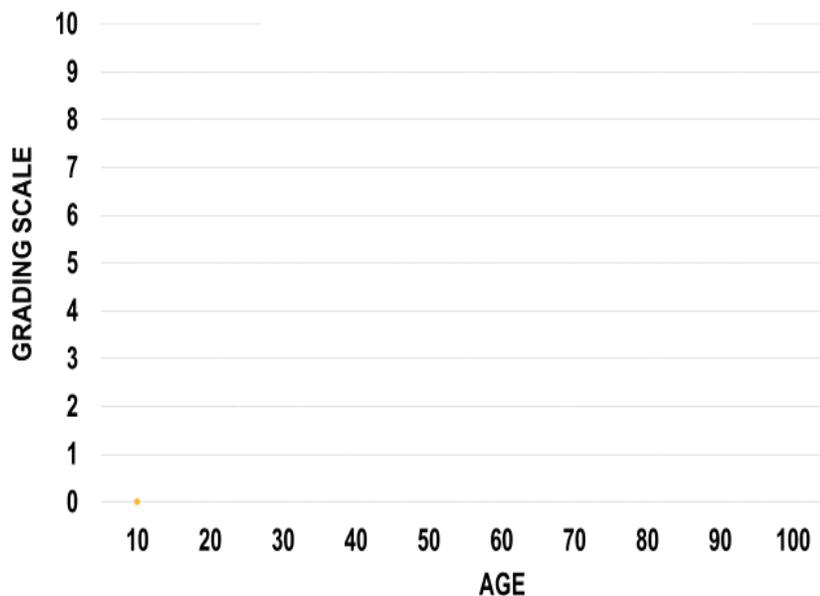
## A Growth Pattern

Here are some thoughts/ideas regarding growth and what “growth” brings to mind.

- Growth is related to maturity – we’re not just talking about growth but growth in maturity
- Growing in wisdom through prayer – James 1.2-5
- Growing in knowledge - 2 Peter 3.18
- Growing in grace – who He is, who I am – it’s not about performance
- The need for relationships
- Growing in knowing the Scriptures
- Growing softer with age
- Growing in your marriage
- Growing in your relations with your family – adult children, grandchildren
- Importance of disciplines/patterns for spiritual growth
- Growing in self-awareness
- Stages of life

Can you plot out and/or reflect on growth patterns in your life or growth patterns you would like to see in your life? Use this sample chart.

# YOUR GROWTH CHART



To sharpen our thinking a bit further about the importance of growth, consider these selected summary statements regarding growth.

“I am 72, and I have determined at that I will keep learning every year for the rest of my life. I never want to stop learning.” President George W. Bush

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.” Henry Ford

“The future belongs to the learning, not to the learned.” Mary Louise Rowand

“In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.” Eric Hoffer

“Once you stop learning, you start dying.” Albert Einstein

“When you stop studying, you are dead.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, President, Dallas Theological Seminary

“When your memories are more exciting than your dreams, you’ve begun to die.” Howard G. Hendricks

“You never get old until your regrets take the place of your dreams.” Bill Gaither, Gaither Music

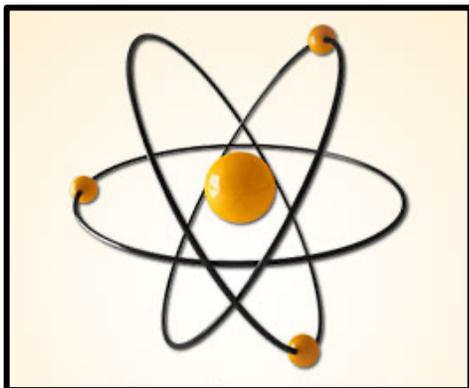
“A man does not grow old, but one becomes old by not growing.” Fred Smith

2. **We will CONNECT** – we will not live alone – we will continue to build strong friendships – we will stay connected.



Consider this African proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”

Let’s begin with two examples from the material universe.



Nothing exists by itself. Consider the basic building block of the universe – the atom. In every atom, particles are all connected. Each atom is its own universe of connected elements. God has created the world to be connected.

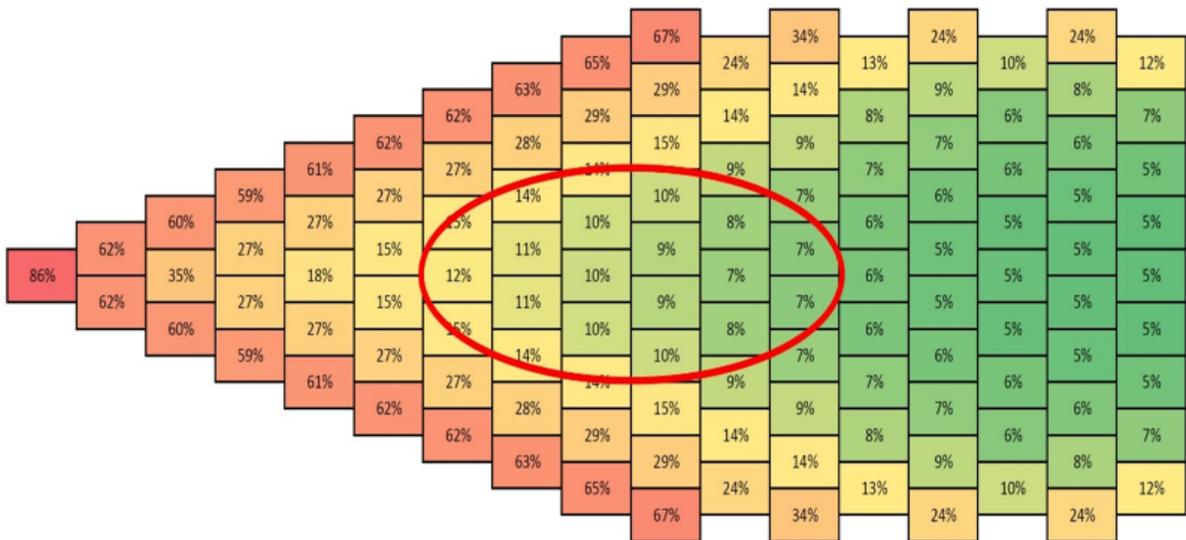


I love the picture of how geese fly together. They rarely (if ever) fly alone. We should learn from them.

Since I love cycling, consider this picture of a cycling peloton and the following chart showing the percentages of wind resistance and energy spent or saved depending on the rider's position in the peloton.



Notice the importance of the rider being connected and how being connected (drafting) is a decided advantage for the cyclist following someone ahead. Look at the advantages of riding together.



Learning from the examples of the atom, geese, and the peloton, what is the value of “doing life” with friends?

Let’s consider some basic Scriptures that speak to the importance of connectedness and strong friendships

*Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart (Ecclesiastes 4.9-12).*

What is the value of strong, personal friendships according to the above verses? In what ways are strong friendships still essential in our aging years?

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*Iron sharpens iron,  
So one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27.17).*

*A friend loves at all times,  
And a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17.17).*

Friendships and connectedness really are the strength of the church. They are also the strength for living life well. Why?

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*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10.24-25).*

How is the writer of Hebrews calling us to be connected in these verses? What might the writer mean by using the word “stimulate”?

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Therefore, since **we** have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding **us**, let **us** also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles **us**, and let **us** run with endurance the race that is set before **us**, fixing **our** eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12.1,2).

Think about the plural pronouns used here and the impact of these two verses on “being connected.”

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In terms of the sociology of aging people, gerontologists Antonucci and Akiyama use the term “convoy” to describe the importance of connectedness in the aging years. Reflect on this paragraph.

*“The Convoy Model of Social Relations* calls for radical friendship in every community. **The term convoy is used to evoke the image of a protective layer, in this case, of family, friends, & colleagues who surround us and help us to negotiate life’s many challenges and opportunities.** Each of us, if we are fortunate, are moving through life surrounded and supported by a group of people with whom we receive and give support. I think our convoys are dynamic and, if we are fortunate, lifelong in nature, changing in some ways but remaining stable in other ways across time and situations. I have a rich convoy or a band of brothers and sisters, consisting of family, trusted old friends from childhood, fraternity brothers, military friends, academic colleagues, students, and even Narnia-like creatures.” (Taken from “The Social Networks in Adult Life and a Preliminary Examination of the Convoy Model,” [Toni C. Antonucci, Hiroko Akiyama](#) *Journal of Gerontology*, Volume 42, Issue 5, September 1987, Pages 519–527).

What does the term “convoy” bring to mind with respect to “connectedness”? When you see a convoy, what descriptive words come to mind?

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Consider this paragraph from Jim Stump.

“You and I are hardwired for relationships. We were created by God to love and to be loved by others. We were created for much more than casual friendships or acquaintances. We need deep and meaningful relationships with those God has put into our lives. We need people who will walk with us through the ups and downs of life, who will be there for us when times get tough, and who will look to us for help and support in their own struggles.

We need people who will intentionally invest in our lives. People who will pray for us when we are sick, counsel us when we're confused, laugh with us when we are happy, defend us when we're under fire, and offer a shoulder to cry on when life gets hard and cumbersome. People who will always be there for us, no matter what. People who need us as much as we need them" (Jim Stump, *The Power of One-On-One: Discovering the Joy and Satisfaction of Mentoring Others*, p.141).

Jesus placed a high value on friendships and being connected. He modeled it for us.

*No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15.15).*

How does this verse speak to being connected? How do you share the core issues of your heart with close friends? How did Jesus do it? How did He share His life?

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*And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that he could send them out to preach (Mark 3.14).*

Why did Jesus choose 12 men to do life together? What did He desire and intend for them learn by being *with Him*?

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The human body is connected. No one part or cell (except cancer cells) lives by and for itself. Ever! The spiritual Body (the church) is connected. Why is this verse important with respect to being connected to each other? Are we more connected or less connected as we age? Why does the world of aging people tend to grow smaller?

*For just as we have many members in one body members and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12.4,5).*

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Let's think through some practical insights to reflect on the importance of being connected with others. What comes to mind as you think about being CONNECTED along with BARRIERS. Imagine this as a white board.

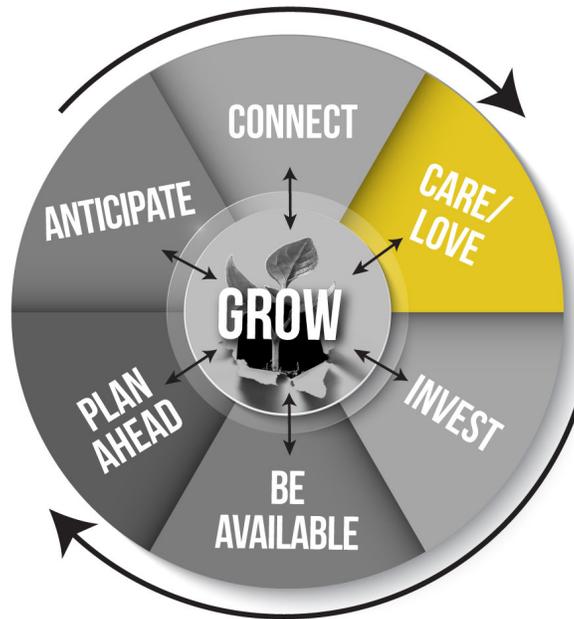
CONNECTED	BARRIERS

**How might Satan work through the above barriers to keep us from being connected?**

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to be a life-long connector?
- Does the aging process work against connecting?
- How might retirement impact connecting with others?
- How can we encourage each other to keep on connecting?
- How can we share this information with others?
- What are your take-a-ways from this session?

3. **We will CARE FOR/LOVE OTHERS** – we will be there for others in their needs – we will love each other as Christ commanded us to love – we will love others just as He loved us.



“Love is what you’ve been through with somebody.” James Thurber

“Think lovingly, speak lovingly, act lovingly and every need shall be supplied.” James Allen

“I would rather have eyes that cannot see, ears that cannot hear, lips that cannot speak, than a heart that cannot love.” Robert Tizon

“Love works in ways that are wondrous and strange, and there’s nothing in life that love cannot change.” Helen Steiner Rice

In this section we want to look into being connected at a deeper level – through love. Our model for CARING for others and LOVING them is our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s look at His life first and reflect on the depth of His love and care for us. Following each Scripture, summarize in your own words the depths of His love and care. How did He care? How did He love?

## Core Verses

### Consider Jesus

It should come as no surprise to us then that Jesus actually commands us to love each other **just as He loved us.**

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13.34-35).*

To start, let's think together about how Jesus loved us. How did he love us? To what degree did He love us?

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12.1-2).*

How did He show His love for us?

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*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5.21).*

What does it mean that "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf?" To what extent did He love us? What did it mean for Jesus, who was sinless, to become sin for us?

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Let's also consider the love of God Himself for both His Son and for us in perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible.

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3.16).*

What does this verse teach us about the love God Himself has for both His Son and also for us?

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According to the prophet Isaiah, how might you describe the depths of what Jesus did for us? How did He love us? Reflect on each phrase. Describe each phrase through Jesus' experience.

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
And our sorrows He carried;  
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten of God, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.  
All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him (Isaiah 53.4-6).*

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As we reflect on these great eternal truths, let's remember that we are called (and commanded) to love each other **as Christ loved us**. This is a much deeper trait than simply being "connected" in friendships, the truth we emphasized in our second essential. This love and care goes beyond that truth.

**Consider Paul**

The apostle Paul exhorts us to live just as our Savior lived. Read these verses and then summarize the way he lived.

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2.5-8).*

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Stunning is all I can say. This is how God calls us to live with and love each other. Jesus was not just casually connected to us. He LOVED us in deep and profound ways. Explain.

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Having considered Christ’s new commandment for all who follow Him, let’s think of a few general biblical guidelines for our relationships with each other and how these verses apply in our aging years? These marks of our relationships with each other grow out of His example in the way He loved us in.

**Consider Each Other**

*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6.1-2).*

What does it mean to restore another person or to bear one another’s burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ?

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*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2.7-8).*

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*My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you (Galatians 4.7).*

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What is the relationship between loving someone as Christ loved us and wanting to “labor” on behalf of friends to see Christ formed in them? What might it mean for us to “labor” on behalf of others?

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*We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose, also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1.28-29).*

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*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Romans 12.9-13).*

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As a group, discuss the impact of caring – what does it mean, what does it look like, and what are the barriers that keep us from being a caring person or a caring community in our aging years?

Love	Barriers

**Now Consider Satan**

**How does Satan work through the above barriers to keep us from loving and caring for others as Christ loved us?**

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**Applying the Truth – The Importance of This 3<sup>rd</sup> Essential (loving each other as Christ loved us) in Our Aging Years**

As we age, the process of aging physically inevitably begins to catch up with us, and those aging challenges may present a whole new set of challenges for us. The apostle Paul noted this fact.

*“Therefore we do not lose heart; though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4.16).*

Can you make a list of the changes that often happen to the body as we age?

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It is in light of these aging challenges that we remind ourselves and the church that our responsibility as followers of Christ is to keep on loving each other as Christ loved us. How can we help each other in our aging years to love and to care for each other well? What are some action steps that can be taken to deepen the network of our friendships in this season of life?

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Here are some other questions to consider.

- 1. In what ways does our church have a responsibility to help care for and love our older members?
- 2. How can we encourage others and keep loving them as we all age?
- 3. What needs do others have that we could meet?
- 4. How might the church develop a strategy for caring for the needs of its aging members?
- 5. How might this strategy include younger folks from across the congregation?

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What might be your take-a-ways from this 3<sup>rd</sup> Essential?

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#### 4. We will INVEST in the generations following us



As we consider this 4<sup>th</sup> essential, “Investing,” consider these questions. Think aloud about them and discuss them as a group.

- Why does God allow us to age? Why did He ordain the aging years as a part of life?
- What are His purposes in our aging years?
- What are the advantages for each of us in having older and younger people in our lives?
- What are the advantages of older people in the life of a congregation?

We’d like to suggest at least two ideas.

First, God wants us to keep growing and trusting Him for all that He wants to be to us and in us in our aging years. Regardless of the hardships we face in the later years, God wants us to keep growing, to keep connecting, and to keep caring and loving those He designs to be a part of our lives (that’s our summary of the first 3 essentials).

Second, we are convinced that one of the reasons God leaves us in this life for our aging years is for the purposes of investing our lives in the generations that follow us. The following key Scriptures bring this biblical truth and personal conviction into clear focus.

### Investing in Future Generations

“The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”  
- William James

**Building into and encouraging future generations is essential in reflecting on the value of the aging years. We begin our thinking about this core essential considering these important texts.**

*O God, You have taught me from my youth,  
And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.  
And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me,  
Until I declare Your strength to this generation,  
Your power to all who are to come (Psalm 71.17-18).*

From this verse, what is God calling me to be and to do?

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Read through the following verses. Can you summarize what our task is with respect to generations that follow us?

*So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture  
Will give thanks to You forever;  
To all generations we will tell of Your praise (Psalm 79.13).*

*I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever;  
To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth (Psalm 89.1)*

*One generation shall praise Your works to another  
And shall declare Your mighty acts (Psalm 145.3).*

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*For He established a testimony (a witness) in Jacob  
And appointed a law (a standard) in Israel,  
Which He commanded our fathers  
That they should teach them to their children,  
That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,  
That they may arise and tell them to their children,  
That they should put their confidence in God  
And not forget the works of God,  
But keep (obey) His commandments (Psalm 78.5-7).*

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Crawford Loritts makes these 5 wonderful observations growing out of this text. \*

1. We need to be the patriarchs and matriarchs who will lead the way and call our families to trust God. God calls us to intentionally nurture and instill a “God-confidence” in the hearts of our grown kids and grandkids.
2. We are here to steward the vision of God from one generation to the next.
3. We will continue to teach our children building on decade after decade, telling the stories of God’s faithfulness, again and again.
4. We will press to fuel future generations with a passion for the character of God and a confidence in the truth of Scripture.
5. As parents and grandparents, we pray for the generations to come. We pray for our grandkids and our great grandkids. **We pray for the generations that we will not see.**

\* This is an incredible sermon preached at the first national conference of the Legacy Coalition. It’s worth hearing. <https://legacycoalition.com/30crawford-loritts-for-a-time-we-cannot-see/>

Psalm 71 reminds me of the biblical patriarch Joseph and the blessing he was to the generations of his family at 110 years of age. He gave them a legacy of hope. He must have been praying for generations he would never see because it was 400 years later that Israel would leave Egypt and dwell in the land God promised to Abraham.

*Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father’s household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim’s sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph’s knees. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.” So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50.22-26). How is Joseph investing in his family?*

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These are God’s assignments to parents and grandparents.

**Consider these classic verses on parenting.**

*Only heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons (Deuteronomy 4.9).*

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6.5-9).*

Describe what you believe these two passages teach about family life as we age.

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For myself, I have typically thought about and taught these verses as though they applied primarily to children in our homes when they were younger, when they lived in our home. As I have aged, however, I now think that these verses are as appropriate to our adult children even as they were when our children were younger. We as older adults have the mission of continuing to teach and be living examples of faithfulness to our adult children and grandchildren as much as when our children were young.

Would you agree?

*It is the living who give thanks to You today, as I do today;  
A father tells his sons about Your faithfulness (Isaiah 38.19)*

How do we talk with our grown/adult kids about God’s faithfulness to us? In what ways might you be able to share God’s faithfulness in your life to your adult children and grandchildren?

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I’m thinking that what Jesus taught about “discipleship” is an important part of multi-generational influence. Would you agree or disagree?

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28.19-20).*

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Making disciples is not optional. Discipleship is adult education. How do we as aging Christians keep making disciples at our age?

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2.1-3).*

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According to the apostle Paul’s relationship with Timothy, what might their relationship speak to what our role is with our own adult children and/or with the younger generations of our church?

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Now, do the following project together. What does “investing” your life into your adult children and/or younger adults in your congregation or community mean to you? What barriers keep us from doing this?

Investing	Barriers

**Once again, consider Satan. How does Satan work through the above barriers to keep us from loving and caring for others as Christ loved us?**

**Let’s Think Together about Our World, Our Culture, and the 7 Generations in Today’s World**  
(birth dates of each generation are in parentheses)

- Silent Generation ’10 – ’26
- Greatest Generation ’27 – ’45
- Boomers ’46 – ’62
- Generation X ’63 – ’81
- Millennials ’82 – ’2000
- Generation Z ’01 – ’19
  - iGeners ’08 – present

Considering the generations following you or ahead of you, what kinds of things might you be able to do that would open doors to making investments into their lives?

In our own church community, how are we “discipling” younger people in the generations following us? How are younger people encouraging older people?

Speaking of the church, we need to be reminded that the church is a multigenerational organism. Investing into the generations that follow and surround us is a critical assignment for both life and church leadership. Are we doing that?

Furthermore, consider the challenge of multigenerational leadership and body life ministry from Acts 2.17:

*“AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS, God says,  
THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;  
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,  
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,  
AND YOUR OLD MEN WILL DREAM DREAMS.”*

God’s Spirit calls older and younger generations to work together in building His church. Are we doing that? Are the dreams of “old men and old women” in your church valued in the work and future of your church? Are we working multi-generationally in the work of our church?

Are there any particular take-a-ways for you in this 4<sup>th</sup> Essential?

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**Mentoring Is Essential**

As we **INVEST** in generations following us, I believe that mentoring is critically important – intentional mentoring. While we mentor by example, I believe that relational mentoring is

essential. I believe that is the way Jesus lived. I believe that mentoring is actually interwoven together with discipleship.

Dennis Rainey's book, Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood, chapters 4 & 5, and have been very helpful to me on this point. In his book, he lists 5 stages of manhood, but I only want to share the last two as those two stages address retiring boomers and seniors, the focus of Finishing Well Ministries. (While Rainey's book is addressed to men, I believe these principles apply equally to women as well as men.)

- The Fourth Step: Mentor
- The Fifth Step: Patriarch

Consider Rainey's words.

"A mentor is a life coach – a tutor and instructor who recognizes that he has the privilege and duty of passing a baton in a generational relay race. Stepping up and becoming a mentor can be one of the most definitive and courageous steps a man makes in his lifetime.

"Every man needs a mentor, and every man needs to BE a mentor. We need another man to speak into our lives, cheering us on, imparting the courage to persevere, summoning us to keep stepping up. In turn, we need to mentor others. This is our generational responsibility (p.147).

"A mentor purposely builds life lessons into those he mentors. As you consider being a mentor, think through what makes life work for you – at work, at home, and in your relationship with Christ. What have you learned about the following?

- Handling pressure and balancing the pace of life
- Working with people
- Building and keeping friendships with other men/women
- Investing in your marriage
- Resolving conflict
- Facing unexpected crises or tragedy
- Managing your finances
- Developing a real relationship with God
- Reading, understanding, and applying the Scriptures
- Raising your children
- Developing the type of character needed to succeed at work
- Growing through failure" (see Rainey, Stepping Up, pp.157-158).

Remember, reaching retirement age does not mean for one moment that we have the luxury of not continuing to pour our lives out for the generation following us. God calls every disciple to continue giving his life away for the blessing and encouragement of others.

In what ways might you consider the invitation and challenge of being a mentor to the younger generations around you in your church or community?

Consider these additional ideas for mentoring, taken from **Vantagepoint3.org** (a wonderful mentoring ministry).

Mentoring: How daunting is the thought of becoming someone's mentor?

Breaking the sometimes-daunting perception of mentoring into smaller pieces can help us recognize the variety of ways mentoring happens.

- **Disciplers** help to develop basic skills for knowing and following Jesus.
- **Spiritual mentors** help others pay attention to the movement of God in their lives.
- **Coaches** help develop skills and motivate people in real-life situations.
- **Counselors** help provide presence, processing, and clarifying perspectives.
- **Teachers** help provide knowledge and motivation for other's learning.
- **Sponsors** advocate for developing younger people or organizations.

***How have you been uniquely wired to pay attention to and companion others?***

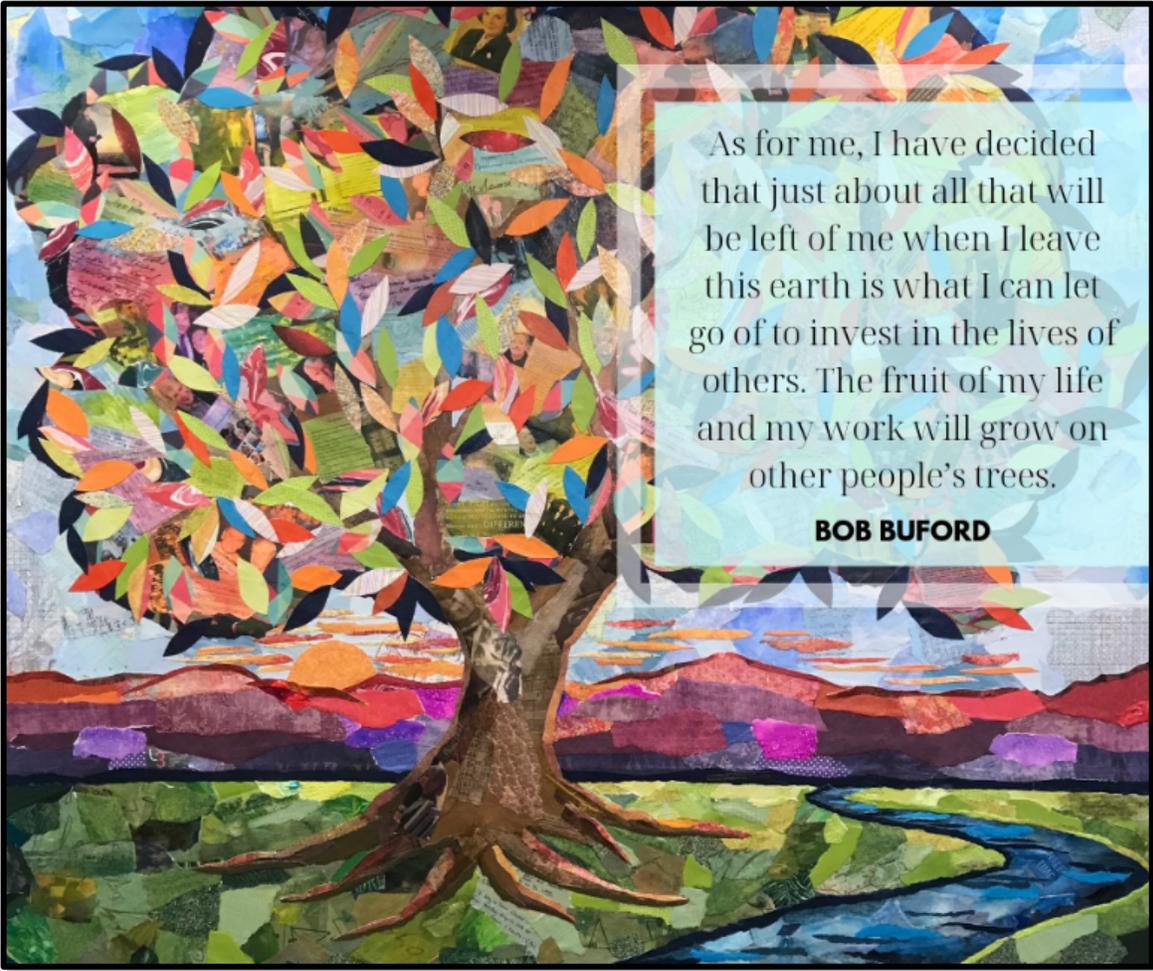
"While I made my living as a coach, I have lived my life to be a mentor, and to be mentored! Constantly. Everything in the world has been passed down. Every piece of knowledge is something that has been shared by someone else. If you understand it as I do, mentoring becomes your true legacy. It is the greatest inheritance you can give others. It is why you get up every day – to teach and to be taught." Coach John Wooden

## **For Further Thinking**

The following biblical passages speak to the importance of transitions from one generation to the next generation. Read through them. Take some notes as to what they teach as it relates to a person's final days in life and truth being passed from one generation to the next generation.

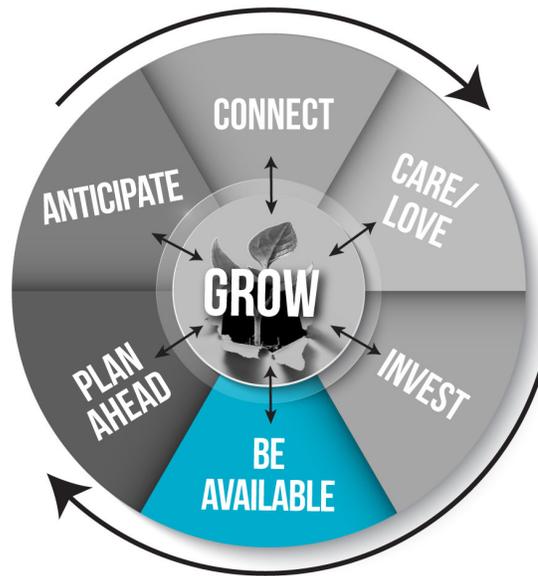
- Genesis 48, 49, 50 – Jacob & Joseph
- Deuteronomy 31-34 – Moses
- Joshua 24 – Joshua
- David and Solomon – 1 Chronicles 28 & 29
- Jesus and His disciples (His entire Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17).
- Paul and Timothy – 2 Timothy

Think about this picture as a summation of this 4<sup>th</sup> Essential.



What are your take-a-ways from this 4<sup>th</sup> Essential?

## 5. We will be **AVAILABLE** - as God calls us to serve



“Being Available” simply means being open to new ways and new people through which God leads and moves in our lives. He often leads us in ways we might never have dreamt.

“Always be ready for the next thing.” Don Guthrie

“Nearly all the best things that came to me in life have been unexpected and unplanned by me.” Carl Sandburg

### **A Summary of My Personal Story**

This is true of my life. God arranged it. He arranged it through friendships. He determined the home into which I was born (Hershey, PA). It was through my home and my local church that I trusted Christ at the early age of six. My high school years were incredibly formative for my spiritual life. I went to Taylor University because of an older brother. God led me to Dallas Seminary through a missionary I met while serving in Haiti on a summer mission project. I met my wife in Dallas through a blind date set up by a close friend. I taught a Medical-Dental Sunday School class of physicians and dentists for 5 years, and it was through that class that I was introduced to a ministry whose work was with Christian physicians and dentists (the Christian Medical and Dental Associations). We served together in CMDA for 14 years. Then, through friends I had originally met in that Medical-Dental Sunday School, I pastored a church (Dallas Bible Church) for 21+ years. FWM was then born out of a network of friendships in that church which I pastored. It may seem as though these events were random, but I believe that He works through “random” events. I am where I am today because of the sovereign hand of God and

how He has led me these 73 years (at the time I'm typing these words). I am who I am because of the people I've met and experiences I have had that have changed me and even the course of my life. I didn't plan it that way. I had no idea how my life would unfold, **but God did!** He led me through all the above, and He keeps leading us now in the same ways through our aging years. The constant key is being available to the leadership of God in life.

**Consider These Basic Scriptures**

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
And do not lead on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3.5,6).*

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*Now the LORD said to Abram,  
Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father's house,  
To the land which I will show you;  
And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;  
And so you shall be a blessing (Genesis 12.1-2).*

In what ways was Abram available?

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*Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed (Deuteronomy 31.6-8).*

In what ways was Joshua available?

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*Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139.16).*

In what ways am I available to do what God ordained for me in these aging years?

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*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another (John 15.16-17).*

Am I available to love and bear fruit to those God brings into my life?

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Think of several biblical examples of how God often works through happenstance, random, and/or unplanned events in life.

Luke 2.1-7 – the birth of Jesus and the census from Rome. Joseph and Mary were available to serve God, to give birth to the Son of God in Bethlehem, and to serve as his parents. They were available. God was working through all the events from the highest levels in Rome to the birthplace of the Messiah (prophesied in Micah 5.2).

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Luke 10.30-37 – The story of the Good Samaritan (v.31 – *“and by chance a priest...”*). The priest and the Levite were not available (why?), but the good Samaritan was available to take care of the wounded man. He wasn't planning or anticipating this event in his day, was he? He was simply available to be interrupted. Take a few moments and write out the disruptions this event meant for the Good Samaritan.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer wisely wrote, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps—reading the Bible.”

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2 Kings 5.1-5 – I love the story of the little captive servant girl and Naaman’s leprosy. She was available to be the voice of God to her mistress for Naaman’s healing. Likewise, Naaman was open to the interruption of bathing in the Jordon River. That interruption changed his life.

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Romans 8.14 – *those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God* (the Spirit has a plan). Am I available to the Spirit for His purposes today? Do I daily seek His leadership? Not only in the big things of life but also in daily routines of life – the little things?

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**John Stuart Gilbert**

Consider the story of John Stuart Gilbert, [From Eden to Paradise](#). This story has made a deep impression on me.



John Gilbert was diagnosed with Duchenne’s Muscular Dystrophy at the age of 5. When he was about 8, he was the poster child for muscular dystrophy and attended a fundraiser/auction for MD in Sacramento. The fund raiser was sponsored by the NFL and therefore oriented to athletic objects. Though he was wheelchair bound, John actually raised his hand to bid on a basketball autographed by every player of the Sacramento Kings. He says that he never felt so many G forces as when his mother pushed his hand back down as they had no money for an object like this. For some unexplainable reason, the bidding on the basketball continued to rise. Finally, the auctioneer said “Sold,” and he looked at a gentleman across of the room to come and receive his purchase. The businessman came to receive the ball, but he did not return to his seat. Rather, he turned and walked across the room to where

John was in his wheelchair, and he gave him the ball. This man noticed John’s desire and gave of himself and his resources to meet John’s need. He was available. (From Eden to Paradise: Something Stronger Than Time, An Autobiography by John Stuart Gilbert, A Father’s Reflections by Bruce Stuart Gilbert, Xulon Press, 2012, pp. 77-79).

This story is etched in my mind forever. Here was a man who happened to see a need and he gave himself to purchase and give the basketball to John. He was **available** for a greater cause at a particular time on that particular day.

It seems to me that this is the way God works. He places opportunities before us, and we can say yes or no to the opportunity before us. What opportunities surround us today? How might God want to use them in our lives today? We’ll never know unless we are alert and say “Yes.”

As I think back across my own life, it seems to me as though all of my life has simply been saying “Yes” to opportunities and people God has placed before me.

That is the challenge to each of us as we age. Will we be the kinds of men and women who will simply say “Yes” to the opportunities God keeps placing before us in our aging years?

We may call it serendipity – God calls it sovereignty, and He shapes our lives through His plans for us (Proverbs 3.5,6).

God will do the same through our aging years if we are alert to Him. He will do that today if we are alert.

Consider how Jesus illustrates this great truth through Luke’s witness. **“He went about doing good”** (Acts 10.38). Jesus was always available for the people His Father brought into His life. Should it be any different for you and me?

*Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, **let us do good to all people**, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith* (Galatians 6.9-10).

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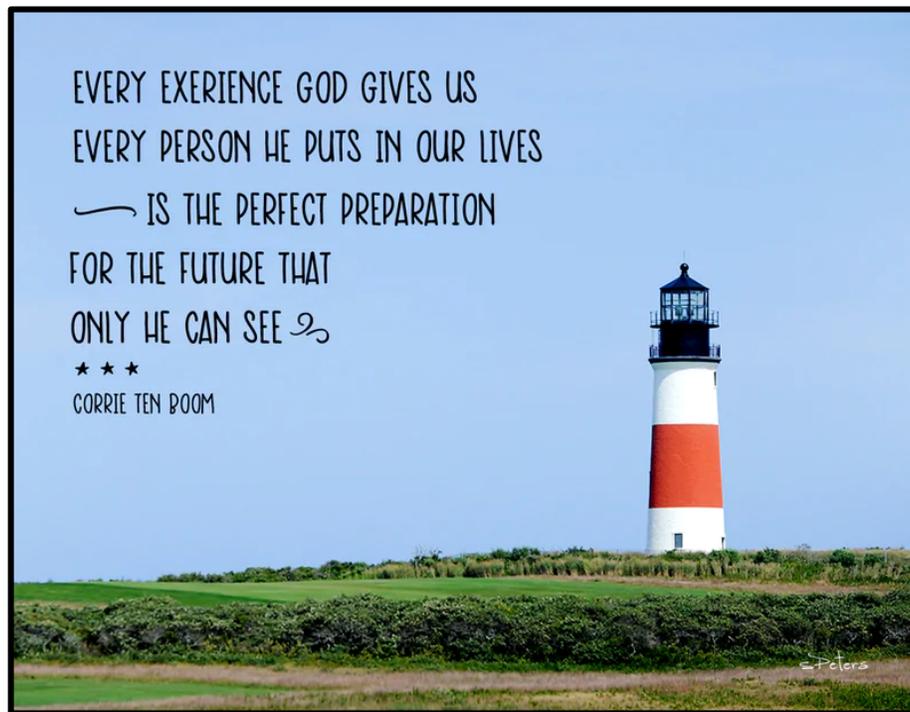
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## Applying the Truth

Let's think together again on our white board about what it means to be available and then think again about barriers that prevent us from being available.

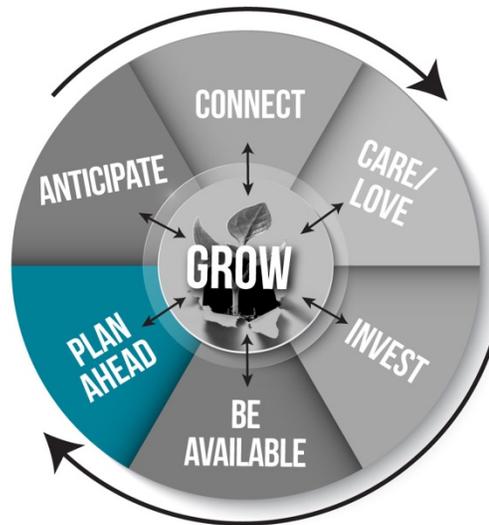
Being Available	Barriers

Once again, consider Satan. How does Satan work through the above barriers to keep us from loving and caring for others as Christ loved us?



What are your take-a-ways from this 5<sup>th</sup> Essential?

## 6. We will **PLAN AHEAD** - for when we will not be here.



Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room I shall be able to see.

—Helen Keller

You're born. You suffer. You die. Fortunately, there's a loophole.

—Billy Graham

I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet, when Christ calls me home, I shall go with gladness.

—Adoniram Judson

“Growing, ripening, aging, dying — the passing of time is predestined, inevitable. There is only one solution if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life, and that is to go on pursuing ends that give our existence a meaning — devotion to individuals, to groups or to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative work... In old age we should wish still to have passions strong enough to prevent us turning in on ourselves. One’s life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation, compassion.”

- Simone de Beauvoir in “The Coming of Age”

William Hazlitt wrote that no young man believes that he will ever die, and the truth of the matter, I think, is that in some measure that is true of all men. Intellectually we all know that we will die, but we do not really know it in the sense that the knowledge becomes part of us. We do not really know it in the sense of living as though it were true. On the contrary, we tend to live as though our lives would go on forever. We spend our lives like drunken sailors (Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*).

What do you think of Hazlitt’s statement in Buechner’s writing?

How might King David’s insight help us?

*Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139.16).*

King David declare that our years were “all written”, even before we lived any one of them. Obviously that includes our final years on earth. What do you think God meant for us to know and experience when He “ordained” our aging years when it comes to the final season of life – including our death?

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Take some time to share your own experiences regarding death. What were they? How did they impact you? What are your first memories of death? Then reflect on these verses.

**Some Selected Verses on Our Last Days and Our Death**

I am amazed at how much the Bible speaks of death. Perhaps every one of the 66 books notes the importance of our death at some point. Even though I’ve selected just several of them, it seems a lot to me. Read them. Think out loud about them.

*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven —  
A time to give birth and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3.1-2).*

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*Lord, make me to know my end  
And what is the extent of my days;  
Let me know how transient I am.  
Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths,  
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;  
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.  
Surely every man walks about as a phantom;  
Surely they make an uproar for nothing;  
He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them (Psalm 39.4-6.)*

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*Why should I fear in days of adversity,  
When the iniquity of my foes surrounds me,  
Even those who trust in their wealth  
And boast in the abundance of their riches?  
No man can by any means redeem his brother  
Or give to God a ransom for him —  
For the redemption of his soul is costly,  
And he should cease trying forever —*

*That he should live on eternally,  
That he should not undergo decay.  
For he sees that even wise men die;  
The stupid and the senseless alike perish  
And leave their wealth to others.  
Their inner thought is that their houses are forever  
And their dwelling places to all generations;  
They have called their lands after their own names.  
But man in his pomp will not endure;  
He is like the beasts that perish (Psalm 49.5-12).*

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*Remember what my span of life is;  
For what vanity You have created all the sons of men!  
What man can live and not see death?  
Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah (Psalm 89.47,48)!*

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*For all our days have declined in Your fury;  
We have finished our years like a sigh.  
As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,  
Or if due to strength, eighty years,  
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;  
For soon it is gone and we fly away.  
Who understands the power of Your anger  
And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?  
So teach us to number our days,  
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90.9-12).*

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*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.*

*Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.*

*Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 12.1-8)!*

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*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,  
And come to an end without hope.  
Remember that my life is but breath;  
My eye will not again see good.  
The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer;  
Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be.  
When a cloud vanishes, it is gone,  
So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.  
He will not return again to his house,  
Nor will his place know him anymore (Job 7.6-10).*

*Man, who is born of woman,  
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.  
Like a flower he comes forth and withers.  
He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.  
You also open Your eyes on him  
And bring him into judgment with Yourself.  
Who can make the clean out of the unclean?  
No one!  
Since his days are determined,  
The number of his months is with You;  
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.  
Turn Your gaze from him that he may rest,  
Until he fulfills his day like a hired man.  
For there is hope for a tree,  
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,*

*And its shoots will not fail.  
Though its roots grow old in the ground  
And its stump dies in the dry soil,  
At the scent of water it will flourish  
And put forth sprigs like a plant.  
But man dies and lies prostrate.  
Man expires, and where is he?  
As water evaporates from the sea,  
And a river becomes parched and dried up,  
So man lies down and does not rise.  
Until the heavens are no longer,  
He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep (Job 14.1-12).*

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*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment  
(Hebrews 9.27).*

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I love these thoughts that Pastor and author Tim Challies contributes when thinking about death. [Do You Knock at the Gates of the Grave? | Tim Challies](#)

#### “Knocking at the Gates of the Grave”

In reading the Puritans and their successors, I’ve often come across a captivating little phrase: ‘knocking at the gates of the grave.’ Jeremy Taylor wrote a whole book about Christian dying and said, “He that would die well must always look for death, every day knocking at the gates of the grave; and then the gates of the grave shall never prevail against him to do him mischief.” Theodore Cuyler sometimes recounted strolling through Greenwood cemetery where three of his children had been laid to rest—two as infants and one as a young adult—and using his time there to metaphorically knock at the gates of the grave, “to listen whether any painful echo comes back from within.”

We, too, should make it our habit to knock at the gates of the grave. To knock at the gates of the grave is to ponder the positive marks of grace that are associated with those who love the Lord and will depart this life to be with him forever. It is to ponder the marks of depravity and hypocrisy that are associated with those who hate the Lord and will depart this life to be separated from him forever. It is to heed the admonition of the Apostle who implored Christians to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

We knock when we pray, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24)! We knock when we cry to God, “Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness” (Psalm 26:2–3). We knock when we prepare to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and examine ourselves, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Corinthians 11:28). We knock when we consider whether our lives are increasingly marked by those precious evidences of God’s saving and sanctifying grace.”

“When we knock at the gates of the grave in these ways and many others, we meditatively listen to hear the distant echoes of the choir of angels or the distant echoes of the gavel of judgment. We knock and then listen for echoes that are encouraging or concerning, delightful or painful. We knock and listen so we are prepared for the day—the inevitable day—when the gates will open to receive us to new life or a second death, to the bliss of heaven or the horrors of hell. We knock to ensure we are waiting, to ensure we are ready, to ensure we will go to be with the Lord we love.”

Well said, Tim. Wise counsel. I also value this Holy Sonnet by John Donne.

### **Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud**

BY JOHN DONNE

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery. Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate  
men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

**Death will NOT have the final word.**

**Not only is death a certainty, but without death we cannot inherit the kingdom of God.**

*Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood **cannot** inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We must die. The imperishable **CANNOT** inherit the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, we are encouraged with the value of every day prior to our death.

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15.50-58).*

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In the following passage, Paul describes death as being “*swallowed up by life.*” Think about this image.

*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be **swallowed up by life**. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge (2 Corinthians 4.1-5).*

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Paul gives us at least two more ideas in these next verses. First, death brings us “*at home with the Lord,*” and secondly, he also reminds us that our death ought also to serve as a reminder to live well in the present life since we each will be held accountable (*recompensed*) for how we have lived in this life.

*Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5.6-10).*

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**Planning Ahead for Death and the Legacy We Will Leave Behind**

We begin with Joseph’s death because his death is a superb example in planning for his death. He plans for the care of his body. He plans for final words of hope, faith, and comfort for both his immediate family along with the nation of Israel. He gathers his sons, his grandsons, his great grandsons, and even his great, great grandsons to give them his final words of encouragement. Finally, he gives that same message of hope to his extended family, the house/sons of Israel. The example of Joseph behooves us to have the same mindset about planning ahead for when we will be gone.

*Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50.22-26).*

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Let’s think together about “planning ahead for when we will not be here.” What comes to mind when you start thinking about planning for your death along with planning for a legacy of hope and faith that you desire to leave with both your immediate and extended family and friends? How will you do it? How will you plan for it?

Plan Ahead/Death	Barriers

**An important question: How does Satan work to keep us from PLANNING AHEAD for when we will be gone?**

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**The Apostle Paul**

The apostle Paul knew in advance his final days were fast approaching. What was he thinking? How was he planning?

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*  
(2 Timothy 4.6-8).

What were the 3 things Paul aimed at as he anticipated the last season of his life? Why were they important to him? Why should they be important to us?

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## Considering Practical Expectations That Will Prepare US Well for the End of Life

- Have you written the stories of your life? Do your kids and grandkids know your story?
  - General biography
  - Places lived
  - Jobs held
  - Highlights
  - Hardships - Failures – Lessons Learned
  - Consider making a video history
  
- People: Who are the people who have influenced you?
  - Immediate family lineage – ancestry.com
  - Extended family
  - Influential people in your life
  - Blessing your kids
  
- Values: What Values have been important to you? Will you pass them on? How?
  - What is important to you – your spouse – your marriage
  - What did your parents teach you?
  - What did you teach your kids?
  - What do you want your kids to teach your grandkids?
  
- Legal Documents: have you taken care of all the legal documents that relate to the end of life one's life?
  - Wills
  - Trusts
  - Durable power of attorney – medical power of attorney – a living will – directives to physicians and your family, DNR in and out of the hospital
  - Passwords/details related to computer, bank and/or investment details – all the individuals associated with any or all the above
  - Kingdom investments – are they reflected in the above
  - Cash available for the immediate future – to help family or other details

- Funeral Concerns: Are your advanced funeral decisions/directives completed?
  - Burial details
  - Disposition of the body – traditional, cremation, body donation
  - Pre-planning, funeral directives, advance payment,
  - Memorial service details - type of memorial service
  - Selection of funeral products
  - Make them in advance – don't saddle your children with those details
  - Writing your own obituary
  
- Pastoral: Conversations/Decisions with your spouse and your spiritual leaders
  - Conversations with your pastor
  - Memorial service details
  - Conversations with your family
  
- Physical: Are you taking care of your health?
  - Regular exercise - staying in shape as best you can
  - Decisions that prolong health
  - Anticipating and planning for physical hardships
  - Long term care
  
- Spiritual: How will you pass on your spiritual story? Have you written it down? Do your kids know the story of how God has worked in your life?
  - Your spiritual story – how has God led you
  - Your spiritual defeats and victories
  - Your milestones (Joshua) – high points of your life
  - People God used in your life
  - Preparing for heaven
  - Communicating with adult kids (grandkids - on appropriate level) in your family about heaven and all the above

Some may ask about our **fear of death**. Death is an event that is ahead for every person. Will we fear it when it comes for us? Will we be ready for it? How might we prepare for death and/or the fear of death emotionally and spiritually?

Here are a few suggestions.

Begin with these important Scriptures. Discuss the texts and think through them line by line or verse-by-verse as you read. What do these passages teach you about death, how to think about it, and life on the other side of death face-to-face with Jesus?

- Psalm 23.4
- 1 Corinthians 15
- John 11
- John 14.1-6
- John 17.20-26
- 2 Corinthians 5.1-10

Furthermore, consider the stories of many Old Testament saints who prepared for their own deaths and shared those experiences with their families. Study these passages and reflect on how they prepared for their death and how they communicated to those around them. What can you learn from them?

- Jacob - Genesis 48 & 49
- Joseph - Genesis 50
- Joshua – Joshua 24
- Jesus prepared the disciples – Acts 1.1-11
- Paul – 2 Timothy 4.6-8

Bring up the conversation. Most people don't like to go there, but death is real, and each of us ought to have a personal degree of comfort in thinking about, preparing for, and initiating conversations with our family and others about death, and specifically about our own death.

**Consider the Death of Moses and How He Prepared for the End (Deuteronomy 34.1-12).**

- Moses knew the time of his death, and he accepted what God appointed for him.
- Moses knew God face to face and he trusted Him – even in death.
- God kept His promise to him to show him the land.
- God personally buried him.
- Moses personally commissioned Joshua, his successor, before he died.
- He was still strong physically when he died.
- He served God faithfully his entire life.

We might also consider the death of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and how He faced His death (Hebrews 12.1,2). Like Moses, He trusted His life to His Father even in death. What did His death mean to Him? What does His death and resurrection mean to us as we contemplate and face our own death?

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# In Conclusion

**Assignment:** Would you take a moment and write your own personal mission statement and thoughts about planning ahead for your own death, taking in consideration of those will leave behind when you will not be here (like Joseph in Genesis 50)? How will you keep planning ahead?

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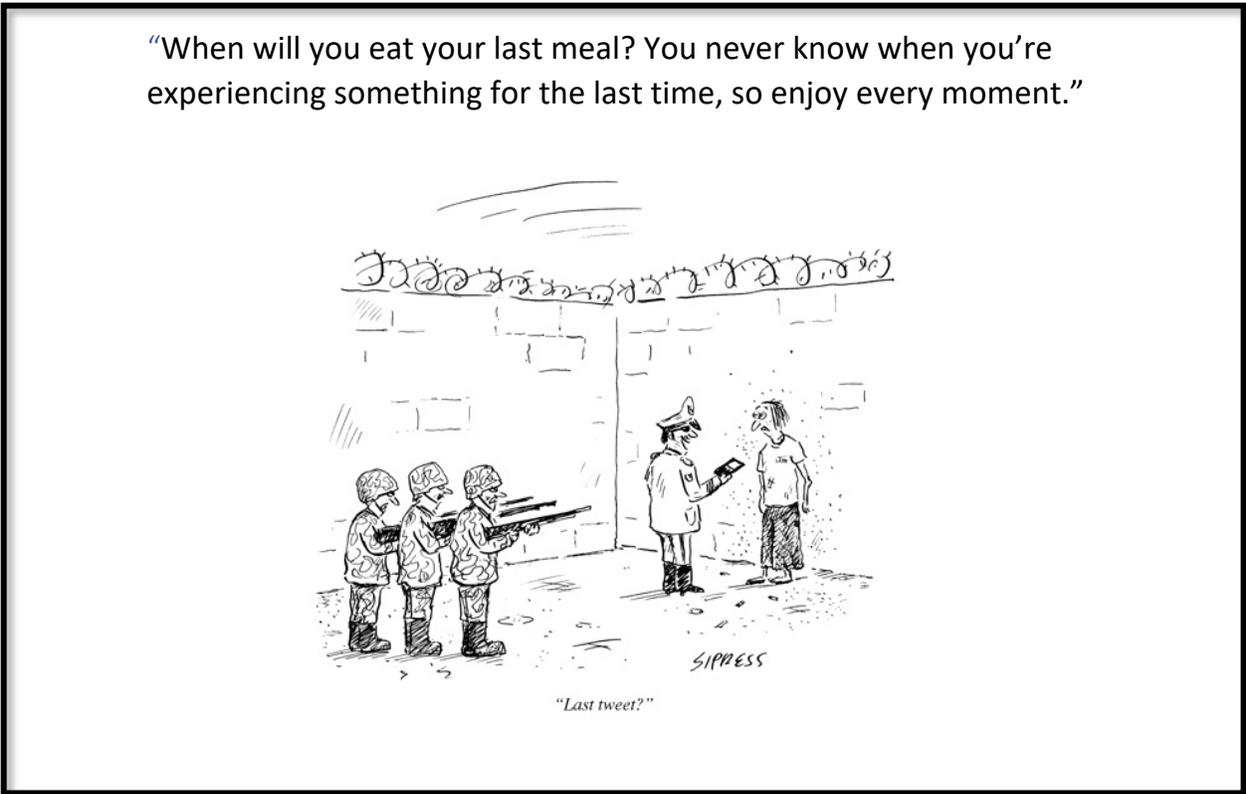
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I have one final story which summarizes the importance of this 6<sup>th</sup> Essential from my friend Don McMinn.



I don't want this post to be morbid but it starts out that way. The main theme is living life to its fullest, but first let's talk about death.

Death is inevitable and unforeseeable. It can occur suddenly at any time, or it can approach slowly and predictably.

As I get older (and particularly as I approach that ominous statistical factor—the average life-expectancy of a male living in America) I often think about *final experiences*, because for everything I do in life, there will be a last time I do it. There will be a final time that I eat dinner with my family, embrace Mary, sing *For the Beauty of the Earth*, see a sunset, visit London.

This thought doesn't bother me; it doesn't make me anxious or fearful. To the contrary, it's beneficial because it reminds me to savor every moment of each day and to delight in experiences both great and small ... to approach every experience as if it were my last time to do so.

For instance, the last time we visited Dubai I said to Mary, "This is probably the last time we'll ever come to Dubai, so let's enjoy it fully." Though we go to London every year at Christmas, last year may have been our last. You get the point.

This exercise in crafting perspective requires negotiating the inevitability of death with the immeasurable joy of living.

To end this post, I'll defer to poets.

Thoreau encouraged us to live fully in the moment when he wrote, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life." (from *Walden*)

Hermann Hesse wrote,

"Life passes like a flash of lightning  
Whose blaze barely lasts long enough to see.  
While the earth and the sky stand still forever  
How swift changing time flies across man's face.  
O you who sit over your full cup and do not drink,  
Tell me, for who are you still waiting?" (from *Klingsor's Last Summer*)

You never know when you're experiencing something for the last time so enjoy every moment of life.

## Some Recommended Resources Regarding Death

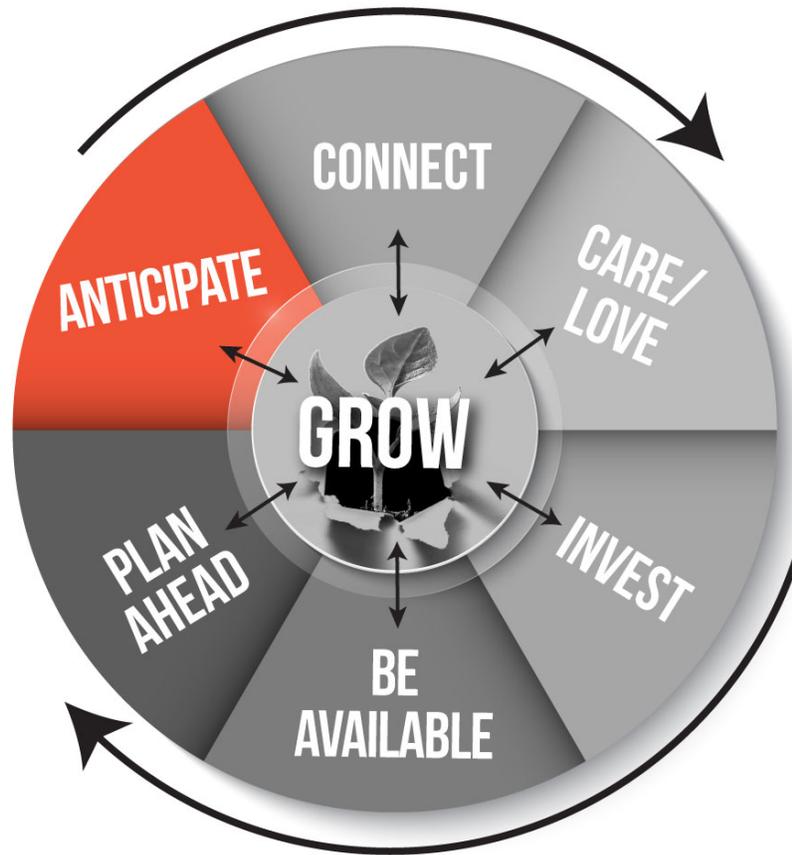
Joseph Bayly, [A View from the Hearse](#). Joe was a personal mentor in my years with The Christian Medical Society, and my conversations with him about death were foundational. Now, here I am nearly 4 decades later thinking about his influence in my life about this subject.

[I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope](#), Douglas Taylor (Banner, 2016 a personal testimony about a journey towards the end of life)

[The Lost Art of Dying: Reviving Forgotten Wisdom](#), L.S. Dugdale (Harper One, 2020)

What are your take-a-ways from this 6<sup>th</sup> Essential?

## 7. We are PLANNING AHEAD and Thinking about and ANTICIPATING Heaven



“Departures are all alike; it is the landfall that crowns the voyage.” C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm

An essential part of one’s “Plan for the End” is the anticipation for heaven and eternal life with Christ. As one nears the end of life, thinking ahead is critically important. It’s just like taking a trip to a foreign country, which my wife and I have often done. In anticipation of that trip, we will spend lots of time discovering where we will be and making specific plans to see and experience as much as we can during the time of the trip we are about to take.

Robert Louis Stevenson has a quote I have always enjoyed; “There are no foreign lands; it is only the traveler that is foreign.”

While it is true that we have not yet traveled to heaven, it is also true that much has been written in the Scriptures to draw us towards it. Therefore, I’d like to suggest we invest time thinking through the following Scriptures in anticipation of heaven – both for ourselves and/or with loved ones who may be closer to heaven than we are. We can also celebrate in our spiritual imaginations what the saints of all ages and even our family members are already experiencing NOW in heaven.

Think about and read these Scriptures regarding heaven. Talk about them. What insights might they give you about heaven? Dare to dream about heaven. It won't be long until we'll be there.

*You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fulness of joy;  
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever (Psalm 16.11).*

What are the "pleasures forever" we will know and experience at the right hand of God, forever?

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*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23.6).*

What might "goodness and mercy" look and feel like "in the house of the LORD forever"?

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*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73.26).*

As our bodies deteriorate and weaken in this life as we age (remember 2 Corinthians 4.16-18), what might God being our strength and portion forever feel like?

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*Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so I would have told you. For I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also (John 14.1-3).*

Why did Jesus say, "let not your heart be troubled?" How does His answer relieve fear? Imagine, if you can, that heaven will be a place where we will be with Jesus forever! Can you imagine what heaven's "dwelling places" will be?

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Furthermore, we know that He will return for us. HE PROMISED!

This verse makes me think of Abraham. According to the writer of Hebrews, "he was looking for a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11.10).

As we contemplate a visual concrete dwelling place, think about the awesome, mind-boggling implications of the new physical city of Jerusalem detailed in the following verse.

*The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal (Revelation 21.16).*

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*But just as it is written,*

*THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,  
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN,  
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM (1 Corinthians 2.9).*

As you contemplate this verse with respect to heaven, remember Paul writes this verse thinking about the mystery of the unfolding drama of redemption. The Old Testament saints could barely imagine what the grace of God would look like through the lens of the crucifixion of the perfect Son of God. How could anyone imagine the monumental grace of God through Christ? The volumes written about Christ's finished work on the cross stagger our imagination. That's why the preaching of the cross is so amazing. Now, could we take that truth and compare it towards the mysteries that God is preparing for us in heaven and for all eternity?! It makes me think of the words of the song, "I Can Only Imagine."

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*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been*

*saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2.4-7).*

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Can we imagine eternity with this phrase in mind – so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus? Could we ever plumb the depths of His grace towards us in Christ?

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself (Philippians 3.20, 21).*

Can we imagine the transformation that will happen in heaven? Think about it. Imagine it!

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*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3.2-3).*

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*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21.1-4).*

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Can we imagine a world like this?

While space here does not allow us to delve into other important Scriptures that speak of heaven and resurrection life, here are additional Scriptures that might spur on our thinking about heaven. Read and reflect over them

- Revelation 1-5
- Revelation 21 & 22.
- 1 Corinthians 15.1-58
- 2 Corinthians 5.1-10
- Colossians 3.1-4
- 1 Corinthians 13.12

Take time to process this chart with respect to heaven. What do the Scriptures bring to mind? What are the barriers that keep us from thinking about heaven? How would Satan use those barriers?

Heaven	Barriers

Have healthy discussions regarding the truth of heaven. When is the last time you’ve had healthy discussions with your aging peers, your adult children, and/or younger generations around you about our eternal destination? Why don’t we think about and/or talk about heaven more?

Consider reading books on heaven and our eternal life on the other side of death.

## Some Suggested Books on Heaven

Heaven, Joseph Bayly, David C. Cook Publishers, 1977, 1987

Heaven, Randy Alcorn, Tyndale House Publishers, 2004

50 Days of Heaven: Reflections That Bring Eternity to Light, Randy Alcorn, 2006

The Dawn of Heaven Breaks, Anticipating Eternity, Sharon James (EP books, 2016)

I Shall Not Die, But Live: Facing Death with Gospel Hope, Douglas Taylor (Banner, 2016  
outstanding personal testimony)

Biblical passages that speak of transitions from generation to generation

- Genesis 48, 49, 50 – Jacob & Joseph
- Deuteronomy 31-34 - Moses
- Joshua 24 - Joshua
- David and Solomon – 1 Chronicles 28 & 29
- Jesus and His disciples - His entire Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17
- Paul and Timothy – 2 Timothy

## Next Steps (NOW THAT YOU'VE COMPLETED THE SEVEN ESSENTIALS)

So now that you've completed this study, what next? What are your "take-a-ways?" Consider these suggestions.

1. Make a personal commitment to keep growing, keep connecting, keep caring, keep investing, keep being available, keep planning ahead, and keep anticipating heaven. Make it a way of life to keep God's purposes in clear focus. Don't ever stop being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8.29).

Dr. J. I. Packer said it this way, **"Runners in a distance race... always try to keep something in reserve for a final sprint. And my contention is that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out. The final sprint, so I urge, should be a sprint indeed."**

We believe that these *7 Essentials* can be a springboard for incredible growth through your aging years and in your church.

2. Keep persuading others in your church to do the same. Make an impact with your peers and share with them the vision of all that God desires to do in our lives to finish well. Share this video series/workbook with them. Become a **Leader/Facilitator** of the Seven Essentials and lead a discussion with others.

When I consider the lament and challenge of the late Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, I cannot help but wish every church, every senior pastor, and every pastor to senior adults in the church would catch a fresh vision for the value of an elder generation in the life of every church and every community.

"Old age is as important and meaningful a part of God's perfect will as youth. He is interested in both the waxing and waning of life. Just as potential is locked up in young people, and often never developed, so the full possibilities of old age often remain dormant and die with the person. **The work of God will be greatly enriched when more attention is given to releasing and utilizing this hidden resource. Older people represent the greatest potential resource and labor pool within our churches, though consistently ignored.**

3. If you have insights or ways this discipleship project can be improved, send your thoughts/ideas to us. We want to make it better. How can we serve you further?

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[hal@finishingwellministries.org](mailto:hal@finishingwellministries.org)

4. Suscribe to the FWM news pieces. You will be encouraged and discover new insights to keep the *7 Essentials* in focus. Sign up here or on our website.

<http://www.finishingwellministries.org/>



5. If this study has proved helpful, would you spread the news about Finishing Well Ministries? Tell you friends about us. Share who we are with your church or with your senior living community.
6. Invest financially in Finishing Well Ministries. While we want to make our resources available at little or no cost, we realize that ministry does cost, so we invite you to give to strengthen the work of FWM. Contribute online (<https://www.finishingwellministries.org/donate>) or send a gift to us at our address.
7. Finally, please pray for FWM. Pray that God will use us (and other ministries focused on encouraging and mobilizing the aging generation of believers across our country) to be about the work God calls us to in our aging years. This is our time.

## About the Author

Hal was born ('49) in Hershey, PA where he grew up on a dairy farm. He trusted Christ at the age of 6. Through a series of God stories, God led him to Dallas Seminary in the fall of '73. While there, he met and in 1976 married his sweetheart, Vicki, who is a native Dallasite.



They have 3 grown children (Jennifer, Bethany, and Jonathan) and 6 grandchildren. Hal has served as a pastor for all their years together in 4 different Dallas-based ministries - First Baptist Church - Dallas, ('76-'80), The Christian Medical & Dental Associations ('80-'93), and Dallas Bible Church ('93-'15). In 2015 he launched Finishing Well Ministries, mobilizing retiring boomers and distinguished seniors as a powerful convoy/peloton for the kingdom of Christ (<http://www.finishingwellministries.org/>). He is a graduate of Taylor University ('71), Dallas Seminary (ThM '78), and Denver Seminary (DMin '88). Hal and Vicki now live in Plano, TX. You can contact Hal at [hal@finishingwellministries.org](mailto:hal@finishingwellministries.org)

# **FINISHING WELL** MINISTRIES

*“Fulfilling God’s Plan for Our Aging Years”*

***“FWM aims to encourage every retired Christian and every Christian thinking about retirement to understand and to fully live out God’s plan for these critically important years.”***

FWM is an ambitious initiative to change the narrative of aging people in the life of our churches and communities. We see the presence of aging followers of Christ as a growing convoy/peloton of saints purposing to make a greater difference for Christ throughout their aging years. Their legacy will strengthen the work of Christ for future generations.

The mission of FWM is to change the ways Christians **think** about **live** in retirement. Culturally speaking, retirement means one stops working at a certain age and then begins receiving Social Security. Our culture seems to understand that this new season means taking a step back. Our best working days are in the rearview mirror. Life changes. Purpose changes. Purpose wanes.

Thinking biblically, however, God’s purposes for His people do not change at the age of retirement. As followers of Christ, we are called to keep growing spiritually, to keep being conformed to the image of Christ, to keep building the church, to keep sharing the Gospel, to keep on being ambassadors for Christ, to keep using our giftedness, and to keep on making disciples in ***every one*** of our retirement years. Mobilizing seniors throughout this retirement season is our purpose.

This season of life is equal in importance to every other season in life – maybe even more important. It is God who has ordained this season and these critically important years. We believe, along with Robert Browning –

Grow old along 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 planned,  
Youth shows but half;” trust God: see all, nor be afraid.

Robert Browning, from “Rabbi Ben Ezra”

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