

A Word To Those Who Are Growing Old

Samuel Logan Brengle:

In one of my recent Meetings a dear sister, who has been serving the Lord and walking in the Light for many years, confessed with tears that her joy was not what it used to be. In her youth joys were rapturous, leaping up like springing fountains and singing birds. A verse of Scripture would suddenly stand out with its assuring message and fill her with gladness, and songs in the night welled up from her glad heart, but now she says she often has heaviness of spirit, and the way seems to get harder. And while she feels sure that she is accepted of God, yet she is not enjoying what she once enjoyed.

God forbid that I should offer any false comfort or, through lack of faith, limit His power to fill us with the rapturous joys of youth as we grow older. But is it reasonable for us to suppose that this should be so? In youth as we waited upon the Lord we found our spiritual strength renewed, and we 'mounted up as with wings of eagles.' In middle age as we wait upon the Lord, we find our strength renewed and we 'run and are not weary.' In old age, as we wait upon the Lord, our strength is renewed, but we must now 'walk and not faint.'

None of the natural senses are as keen in old age as in youth. The appetite for food, the joy in society, the rapturous friendships of youth do not continue quite the same through the years, and may it not be so spiritually? It is true that the Apostle says while the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. But is not the joy in some measure, at least, modified by the sobering experiences of the years? The river that started as a bubbling, leaping, laughing brook in the mountains, often rushing in torrents through narrow and precipitous ways, gradually widens and deepens and flows peacefully and without noise as it nears the sea. May it not be so in our spiritual life? Is not the river of God's peace flowing through the hearts of the aged a deeper and richer experience than the exuberant joys at the beginning of the spiritual life?

The pressing infirmities of the flesh, and the gradual decay of memory and other powers, may account for some of the apparent loss of joy in those who are growing old.

The enlarged knowledge of the malignant, massive, stubborn powers of evil may have a sobering effect upon the mind which, if not watchfully guarded against and met with quiet, steadfast faith, may tend to lessen joy.

If our children do not serve God with the ardor we wish, or souls for whom we pray do not at once get saved, or the work of God which is dear to our hearts languishes, the Devil may tempt us to doubt or repine, and so our joy is quenched.

What steps can be taken to prevent or arrest the failure of joy?

1. Aged people should still stir up the gift of God that is in them as we stir up a fire that is burning low. Frequent seasons of prayer, singing and humming through old songs, with an active exercise of faith, will help to keep the joy-bells ringing. I am a rather poor sleeper, and only recently in the small hours of the night, before the birds were singing, I found myself wide awake, and to bless my own soul and control and guide my thoughts without disturbing others, I softly, in almost a whisper, sang, 'I need Thee, Oh, I need Thee,' and my heart was strangely warmed and blessed as I sang.

2. Again, old people are not wise to spend too much time considering the joys of long ago and comparing them with present emotions. They should live in anticipation of joys yet to come rather than dwell upon joys that are past. God's storehouse is not exhausted. For those who love and follow Jesus, 'the best is yet to be.' Paul said that he forgot the things behind and, looking forward, he pressed like an eager racer toward the things that are before.

Those who keep looking backward instead of forward are likely to stumble and miss the joys that spring up round about them. It is not well to be comparing the present with the past, but we should each moment seek to exercise full and glad faith in our Lord for the present and the future. He has a portion of joy for us now. But the ineffable glory and blessing and joy are yet to come, when we see Him face to face and hear Him say, 'Well done, come!'

We must keep our eyes on Jesus, looking unto Him, the Author and the Finisher of our faith. We must look away from the seen things to unseen, eternal things; to the purpose and covenant of God in Christ, steadfast and sure; to His promises, great and precious, shining like stars for ever and assuring us of God's interest in us.

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We should carefully count up our present mercies and blessings and give thanks for them. It may be better with us than we think. John Fletcher said that he at one time became so eager for what he had not yet received, that he failed to rejoice and enjoy the things God had already given him. That is an almost certain way to lose what we have. It is well, it is indeed a duty, to stretch out for the things before, but we must not forget to give God thanks and enjoy the things He now gives us.

In feeble health we may not be able at all times to realize all we have to be glad about. There may be deep and at times prolonged depression of spirit arising from physical causes. 'The body and soul are near neighbors,' said the Founder, 'and they greatly influence each other.' Elijah was physically exhausted when he got under that juniper tree and wanted to die, but God let him sleep, awaked him, and gave him a simple meal of bread and water, let him sleep again, and again waked and fed him and let him live in the open, in sunshine and fresh air, and so revived him, gave him a man's work to do, and took him to Heaven in a chariot of fire. All God's resources were not exhausted because Elijah was depressed and exhausted. The best was yet to be with Elijah! Simple food, fresh air and sunshine, labor and rest are still important for old people, if they wish to keep a happy experience.

Finally, old people should still go to the house of God and mingle with God's people. It was in the temple that aged Simeon and Anna the prophetess found the little Lord Jesus. And the Psalmist sang, if not from his own experience, then from observation of others and in assured faith 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing: to show that the Lord is upright' (Psalm xcii. 13-15) Hallelujah!

When darkness seems to veil His face, I rest on His unchanging grace;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame But wholly lean on Jesus' name.