

# Aging with Attitude

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People have various perspectives about aging. We often fear old age—believing it will result in unavoidable health challenges, cognitive decline, isolation, or loneliness. In contrast, the Bible teaches us to look at the aged—and the inevitable process of aging—with kindness, hope, and respect. In *A Vision for the Aging Church*, Michael Parker cites a rabbinical proverb, “He who learns from the young is like one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from the winepress. But he who learns from the old is like one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.”

In every stage of psychosocial development, how we navigate specific developmental tasks can help us grow and thrive as well as prepare us to move healthfully into the next stage of development.

*Psychosocial Theory* describes the aging process: During **Later Adulthood**—also referred to as **Old Age** (60 to 75), developmental tasks include:

- Accepting one’s life
- Redirecting energy toward new roles
- Promoting intellectual vigor
- Developing a point of view about death

The psychosocial crisis of Later Adulthood is *integrity versus despair*, which includes the process of introspection—intentional self-evaluation and focused thinking.

Key developmental tasks during **Very Old Age** (ages 75 through death) include:

- Coping with the physical changes of aging
- Developing a psychohistorical perspective
- Traveling through uncharted terrain

The psychosocial crisis of Very Old Age is *immortality versus extinction*, addressed through the central process of social support. Our families and churches can provide vital help.

The world is experiencing a longevity revolution, with increasing numbers of people living into *old age* and *very old age*. But we live in a youth culture in which many people fail to appreciate elderly people they know—or themselves (if they’re in the *old* or *very old* categories). It’s important to choose healthy attitudes about aging, as well as healthy habits (e.g., exercise, nutritious eating) and walk in Truth rather than cultural beliefs.

1. We can choose an attitude of **gratitude**. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once said, “I feel gratitude in my heart every time I can meet someone and look at his or her smile.”
2. We can **live in God’s power** rather than our weaknesses. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us* (2 Corinthians 4:7, NKJV).
3. We can actively **share God’s love**, regardless of how or when our bodies deteriorate. *Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain*

(Philippians 2:14-16, ESV). God provides unique ways for each of us to share His love. As John Stott said, “God intends us to penetrate the world. Christian salt has no business to remain snugly in elegant little ecclesiastical salt cellars; our place is to be rubbed into the secular community, as salt is rubbed into meat, to stop it going bad. And when society does go bad, we Christians tend to throw up our hands in pious horror and reproach the non-Christian world; but should we not rather reproach ourselves?”

4. We can repeatedly tell ourselves, “**It’s OK to be a burden.**” Dr. John Stott was 88 when he said, “I hear old people, including Christian people who should know better say, ‘I don’t want to be a burden to anyone else. I’m happy to carry on living so long as I can look after myself, but as soon as I become a burden I would rather die.’ But this is wrong. We are all designed to be a burden to others. You are designed to be a burden to me, and I am designed to be a burden to you. And the life of the family, including the life of the local church family, should be one of ‘mutual burdensomeness.’ *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2).
5. We can choose an attitude of **joy, being confident our lives are secure in God.** My dear friend Cindy Rantal says, “For me aging is about verbally speaking out loud my appreciation for every encounter and person in my life every day.” Citing Nehemiah 8:10, *The joy of the Lord is your strength*, Cindy adds, “I think you have to be around children (either your own or others’).”
6. Because **we’re designed by God** as an integral part of His eternal plan, **we live without fear of the future**, speaking wise words with kindness (see Proverbs 31:25-26 and Ephesians 2:10). C. S. Lewis said, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”
7. As **Christ’s ambassadors** (see 2 Corinthians 5:19-20), we are empowered to represent Him every day! You have something important to offer—from a gentle touch or a kind word to the gift of time helping an overwhelmed young mom; it could be reading a book to someone losing his vision or driving someone to the store or medical appointments. In *Gilead*, Marilynne Robinson wrote, “To be useful was the best thing the old men ever hoped for themselves, and to be aimless was their worst fear.”

For those who are aging and those caring for them, God offers peace, power, and purpose. Romans 12:1-2 (NLT) implores us to: *Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

**You can search God’s Word to discover additional thoughts about aging.** For example:

*Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD* (Leviticus 19:32).

*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you* (Deuteronomy 32:7).

*But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the LORD’s own house. They flourish in the courts of the LORD. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. They will declare, ‘The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him!’* (Psalm 92:12-14).