

Drawing Near: Aging & Suffering

In the closing scene of John's gospel, Jesus challenges his closest friend to embrace the truth that aging brings a loss of autonomy. All Jesus asks of us is to follow him. There is work for aging people to do. Job 12:12 and Psalm 71:18 show us that the Christian life is not a vocation or something to retire from.

The ideas of aging, suffering, and dying are a work in and of themselves—something that God has called us to embrace. With the decay inherited in Genesis 1 comes the spiritual work of aging maturing, and influencing the world around us. Our brokenness is meant to awaken our souls; a physical reminder of our damaged spiritual condition. What follows is a realization that any hope and peace we can long for has to be rooted elsewhere.

Paul talks about his personal struggles with the reality of death in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10. Ultimately there are two ways to get through life: relying on ourselves or on God and his resources. Suffering is used as a tool of shaping, one that creates a new type of abandonment and trust. These concepts are often distant and thus easy to talk about, but they prove difficult to put into practice. When push comes to shove, we will prove through our actions that we believe (blank) is better than Jesus. Even the best things, however, are only meant to be capable of temporal joy. Aging, suffering, and dying soften our grip on life and allow us to shift our hope. This shift to an ultimate hope is designed to become easier as an elderly person whose sense of life's fleeting nature is far keener than a young person.

In verse 10 Paul hits the high note. Aging removes our independence, allowing us to embrace confidence in the God of rescue. God has given his children life, both physically and spiritually, and his glorious rescue mission is not over. This is why Romans says that all creation groans for a future glory. Our pain now is a gracious reminder that our strength can't be our own. Our hope can't be in the here and now. Our dependence is in a God full of grace and faithfulness.

Here are a few key ideas:

1. God has work for us as we age. Getting older IS the work. Our limitations allow us to learn in a way that we couldn't if we thought we didn't need God. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
2. Embracing death allows us to release the idol of control.
3. WE have a responsibility to teach and prepare our friends and family.
4. We should give honor to those who are aging. Those who are suffering carry a weight in ways that we never have. They can bring a perspective that a younger person who is wrapped up in life can't have. Aging is the greatest teacher of the groaning and the glory.

