

The Godly Senior

The Godly Family

By Dr. David P. Murray

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Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids
950 Ball Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.frcgr.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/frcgr

Let us turn again to Psalm 92 and we'll read verses 12 to the end.

12 The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; 15 To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Just a couple of miles away from here, we know the famous Meijer Gardens where we can go and at various times of the year we can get tours of the beautiful trees and shrubs and flowers. And as these tours take place, there is often the greatest interest in what's new: the newest flowers, the newest species, the newest displays. Well, in this Psalm, God takes us on a tour of his garden and, as we'll see, he has a different focus. His favorite area is not so much what's new and fresh but his favorite area is what's older and more mature. You can see here, for example in verse 12, he says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." He here draws us into his garden and he points to the righteous, to his people, and he says they are like these, as straight and fruitful as date palms, and they are like these majestic and strong Lebanese cedars.

But then he takes us a little bit further, he describes how these trees are growing in verse 13, "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God." He's saying the soil of these trees is the means of grace. It's the place where the word of God is read and preached and sung and where prayer is made, that this is what makes these date palms shoot up and these Lebanese cedars strengthen.

Then he says in verse 14, "Come a bit closer. I want to show you something really remarkable. My favorite place in this garden, They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." He's saying, "Look at all my people, all Christians, but look especially at the older ones, the mature ones, the seniors." And he wants us to notice five special things about these seniors which we want to look at this morning, but before we do so, let's just notice this Psalm in general. It's a Psalm, really, about God's righteous government of the world in the face of much wicked opposition. The first five verses are

full of praise and then from verse 6 to 10, it describes the folly and frailty of the wicked opposition to God before turning in verses 11 to 15 to the beauty and the blessedness of God's people.

Now, you may ask, "Well, why should we focus on seniors?" Well, as you know, we've been going through a series on family life. We have looked at being a mother, being a father, being a child; we looked at being a husband, a wife, and a single, and today we come to the last in that series, being a senior. And we want to address this in particular because each age and stage of life has its own trials, its own peculiar special afflictions, difficulties and obstacles, but also because each age and stage of life has its own opportunities, as I hope also to show us. It may be that some of the younger ones here are saying, "Seniors, I've got 40 years to go, 50 years. What was the point in me coming this morning?" Well, the whole point of the commandment that we're looking at, "Honor your father and mother," is about helping us to think more about others, especially those senior to us, those in authority over us, and to kindle respect and honor, appreciation and love and how do we do that unless we learn about them, we find out about them? We tend to be very selfish, especially when we're young, so it's an opportunity to learn, but also to grow because as I hope to show you, the seniors among us have much to teach us and help us with in life. Of course, we hope that each young person here will one day be a senior themselves and it's good to get ready for that, to prepare.

So, how does God describe seniors? First of all, he says they grow. They grow. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." Now, when we think of old age, the words we usually think of are words like "fatigue, decay, decline, weakness," and these are biblical words for old age. We think of Ecclesiastes 12 which gives us a very poetic and picturesque description of what it's like to age and it's not a pretty picture. However, here God brings another perspective, one that is not natural, not normal, not easy to see, and he's saying, "Here's what I see. Yes, I see decay, I see fatigue, I see pain, I see weakness, but I also see growth." These date palms that are being spoken of here were famous for how tall they grew and these Lebanese cedars were very famous for how broad and strong they grew, and here's he's saying, "That's what my people are like. They shall flourish like the palm tree, they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

And of course, this fits the word of God in, for example, 2 Corinthians 4:16, the apostle says, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Here we have the two perspectives brought together. There is the physical weakening but the spiritual strengthening. The outer growing weaker, for sure, day by day, but the inner growing stronger. That's the perspective that this Psalm brings before us. Of course, this is hard for us to see because it's often invisible and imperceptible. You don't come to a tree one day and say, "Whoa, I see tremendous growth from yesterday!" No. Tree growth is slow, it's imperceptible, it's invisible, really, but God's word says of his people they are growing and he calls us to believe it, even though as we look at seniors, as seniors look at themselves, they see the opposite, maybe, as the focus is on the physical and the natural abilities is just decline and weakness. No, he's saying, "There's growth here too. There's renewing."

Secondly, he says they are fruitful and that's really the reason he uses the illustration of the palm tree. It's a date palm that was renowned for its very straight appearance, its very high appearance, but also for its fruitfulness. These palms were often used, their fruit was used to nourish desert nomads. They really went from each oasis to each oasis to benefit from these date palms, not just the shade they gave but also the fruit they gave and also the way that they indicated the presence of water. These date palms had very deep roots which, of course, was needed when there was such a height, and these roots, they sought out water in the depths of the desert. So when these palms were seen, the nomads knew there was water close by that they could benefit from.

And so when we think of seniors being compared here to these date palms, we think, again by faith, of them as fruitful. They are bearing the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, hope. God looks at his seniors and he sees branches heavy with rich and nourishing fruit which benefits others in the desert of this life, and which draws people to them because there's a sense of these people, these seniors must have something that we don't and so they have a drawing, a beneficial influence. And of course, one of the reasons why these seniors bear so much fruit, so heavy fruit, such varied fruit, is because they have been pruned so skillfully through the years. By God's chastizing hand and his trying hand, he has cut off areas of life and areas of pleasure and other aspects of their life as they have grown up, in order that there might be more fruit, better fruit, and more beneficial fruit.

They grown. They are fruitful. Thirdly, they are fresh. It says in 14, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." Quite remarkable. Most trees stop fruit bearing after a certain age, but not these ones. They keep going. Why is that? Well, it's because they have this freshness. The word here, "they shall be fat," is the word for "sap." They shall be sappy. They shall have this inner moisture, this secret source of sustenance and growth. So these trees might be looked at and maybe the bark of them is looking rather wrinkly and aged and even not very healthy and yet God says, "Look within. Look behind the appearance. There is something there that's invisible to the normal, natural, human eye. There is something secret. There is something deep within and if you were able to cut through it and open it up, you would see this sap oozing out, this rich source of inner nourishment, this inner fatness that produces an outer fruitfulness."

They shall be fat. Of course, this is speaking of the Holy Spirit, the inner source of spiritual nourishment in the senior, in the old believer's life. Yes, it's not visible, it's not seen, outwardly they look as if they're a bit wrinkly and gnarled and weak and sick, but were you to get inside them with a spiritual stethoscope, you would find this rich sap of the Holy Spirit still there, still feeding, still strengthening, still blessing and building this older believer.

They shall be fresh. And then our freshness, and really this is a tremendous challenge too to the older believer, to seek more and more of that inner sap, that inner strengthening, that inward empowering of the Holy Spirit because what's envisaged here is not somebody who has lived 40-50 years in the Christian life and they're living off the past,

they're living off stale, old, past experiences, no, they are living off present, ongoing, continuous tense spirituality. Oh yes, they can talk about the Lord's work in their lives 20, 30, 40 years ago, but they are also seeking that ongoing renewal. They're not resting in the past. They're not living off the past but seeking this freshness that is so possible for an older believer to experience.

So they grow, they are fruitful, they are fresh, and they are, fourthly, flourishing. And this is in great contrast to the wicked. You'll notice earlier on in this Psalm, the wicked are described, for example, in verse 7, "the wicked spring as the grass, the workers of iniquity do flourish." There is wicked men, they're flourishing, but the whole point of this Psalm is that the wicked's flourishing is brief, it's short, soon over, it's temporary. And in contrast, here are believers who have lived righteous and holy lives and while the wicked know nothing but decay, their flourishing is in the past. Here are those who are still flourishing. They still have spiritual abilities. They still have spiritual senses that are not fading.

Their eyes no longer see but by faith they see Christ clearer than ever. Their ears, they're not as sharp as they used to be, they don't hear voices as easily, but they hear the voice of God in his word more clearly than they ever have. Their voice is a bit croaky, it's not as pleasant and tuneful as it used to be, but they still make melody in their hearts to the Lord. Their feet are a bit shaky, they're not so steady on their feet, but they are still walking steadily in the path of righteousness even for his own name's sake. Their skin, for sure, it's wrinkly and it's marked and it's dry and it's hard, but God still finds them beautiful in his sight. Their appetite, they don't have that as much as they used to. Their food at times is something that they have to take. The appetite and digestive abilities are not as strong, and yet they still have an appetite for the word of God, for the bread that is from heaven. Their taste is disappearing, everything just tastes the same, and yet they can still taste and see that God is good and who trusts in him is blessed. Their heart is pretty weak, it's pretty unreliable, it's fading, but their spiritual heart is still beating and pulsing strong and sure and steady. Their interests in this world are not what they used to be. They look at the various politics and international events and it just doesn't interest them so much as it used to, but their interests in the world to come are far greater, far more intense. That's what they want to study and hear about.

They are still flourishing spiritually. Again, much of this is not visible to the naked eye, not to these seniors and not to those of us looking on, and part of that is because a lot of this is inner warfare. Yes, there were days when they engaged more visibly and audibly and physically in the Lord's cause and fighting for the truth, but increasingly as their natural and physical abilities lessen that's not so available to them, but there is still inner spiritual warfare to be fought, fought for themselves as they fight against many of the trials of old age like loneliness, like the temptation to be bitter; like the temptation to fear and be anxious about the future; like the temptation to be full of resentment and vengeance. That warfare, fighting these spiritual enemies is daily raging in their soul and also they fight not just for themselves, but for the cause of Christ, again, but more spiritually, more in secret as they go to their knees and pray and call on the name of the

Lord for his cause and his kingdom. So there is still this inner warfare against the world, against the flesh, and against the devil.

They are still flourishing. This is what God sees. They grow. They are fruitful. They are fresh. They are flourishing. And they are witnessing, fifthly. Why does God do all this for them and in them? He says the reason in verse 15, "To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." Here they are creaking along and yet still they are a witness, that by lip and by life, actively and passively, they are testifying to all around them as they can these two things: the Lord is upright and the Lord is my rock.

The Lord is upright. They are saying, "Whatever has happened to me in my life, however hard, however many trials and difficulties and disappointments, the Lord is upright. I'm not blaming God. I'm not accusing God. I'm not putting the blame on God. No, he's righteous. He has never dealt with me as I have sinned, he's always dealt with me in mercy. The Lord is clear. The Lord is vindicated. Anything hard I brought upon myself. The Lord is upright. There is no unrighteousness in him." And surely this is one of the great desires of seniors towards the end of their life, to make sure that all around them know they still trust in this righteous God, that they are not bitter towards him, however hard life, especially senior life, has become. It's one of the most awful painful things to visit older people in latter years, weeks or days, and find nothing but complaint and grumble and bitterness. May God save us from it, that we might have this witness to the end.

Our Brother Bill had this testimony right to the end. It was beautiful. One of the great privileges was to see that and hear that. It was just a tremendous peace, a tremendous calm, a tremendous trust. May God help us to follow in these footsteps and to say, "He is my rock. He is my sufficiency. And I'm not doing this in my own strength and might but it's God that's underneath me. It's God that guards me. He is righteous and he is a rock." Let lip and life combine in this beautiful testimony to our families and loved ones.

So these are five beautiful divine descriptions of seniors and seniors among us who are God's people, you must take this to yourself. I know you probably feel the exact opposite, you feel far from growing, you feel far from fruitful, you feel far from fresh, you feel far from flourishing, you feel as if nothing you say has any effect. Listen to what God's word says, not what your feelings say. Listen to how God views you, not how the mirror views you or society views you. This is God's view of old age of his people in their senior years. Let this form your image of yourself because this is how God views you and it's a fight of faith. It's a spiritual battle to take these words and believe them rather than the aches and the pains that speak to us so loudly day by day.

But I want to finish this morning with some very practical counsel to seniors. Given all these things are true, what counsel would God give us in our senior years? Then I want to finish with a few words to known seniors among us.

And what does God say to us? Well, given all these things are true, the first thing that God would say to us is: steward your resources well. Steward your resources well. In a beautiful little book on aging by J. I. Packer, who is now I think in his mid 80s, just a short little book from Crossway, he says this phrase near the beginning, "Aging is not for wimps." Aging is not for wimps. It's tough. It's hard. You know that. You've seen it. Maybe you're experiencing it. And therefore, how do we get through this? God says these things of us but he also calls us to take responsibility and so one of the things we should do is, of course, steward our physical resources to still try and maintain bodily fitness, health and strength to as late our years as we can, not just to give up on our bodies which are the temples of the Holy Spirit, but to care for them, nourish them, strengthen them, insofar as we can.

We also have to steward ourselves mentally and intellectually. Wherever we end up, whether it's in a nursing home or a hospital or being cared for in our own homes, it's very easy just to very rapidly slide into a state of passivity and of mental sloth which has its own vicious circle. It just gets worse and worse. And so we are called, surely, to be flourishing, to be fresh, to still be studying, still be reading, still challenging our minds, still keeping our mental abilities as sharp as they can be and not just give up.

There is also, of course, stewarding of our financial resources for old age, that we don't just throw it all away in a great splurge as many do after they retire from their workplace, but to keep these resources and use them for our own and our family's benefit.

But above all, there is the stewarding of our spiritual resources, that we should still be gathering spiritual resources to strengthen us and freshen us and flourish us and to make us fruitful and enabled to witness. Yes, God says these things are true but calls us also to make these things so as well insofar as we can. There is a stewarding of these God-given resources.

Secondly, thank God for senior years. As you know as you look around you, many of your compatriots, many of your age group, have not made it to senior years. Or if they have, they are in far worse health than you are. That's why I believe this Psalm starts with such a song of praise to God. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night." Listen to this old person sing. Verse 4, "For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep." He's saying given these things are so, how much more praise should you have in your older years as you ponder how the Good Shepherd has led you through life.

Then, thirdly, keep learning and keep leading. Keep learning and leading and, really, both of these go together. So God has relieved you of secular work and you have more time on your hands, what are you going to do with it? Surely, this calls us to keep learning, not just to stagnate, not just to coast, especially in spiritual things. God has now given you time to read books that you've never had time for in your life before. He's given you time to pray in a way that you never had time for before. You're not trying to get out to beat

the rush hour, you've not got all these multiple responsibilities that stress you and tire you out so much that you just about fall asleep when you go on your knees in the evening. He has freed you up to learn, to learn more about him, to learn more about how to pray, and to use all that learning that you've accumulated through your life and you're continuing to accumulate in your senior years to lead. Yes, you were a leader in your work, in your office, in your business, but surely now is the time to use all these skills, all that experience in leading the church of God either officially in office or unofficially in mentoring young people and others who need your help, your advice, your wisdom, and your experience. Don't isolate yourself. Don't fell, "Well, there's nothing left for me to do but roll down the hill and die." No, this is a time to learn and it's a time to lead.

Fourthly, serve. Serve Christ's family as well as your own, of course. God willing you have greater opportunity now to be a help, not an interference but a help to your family, to relieve your daughter or daughter-in-law caring for young children as opportunity arises. To help your son or son-in-law in physical work around their yard or home or whatever. It's strange, you know, the world's idea of retirement is, "Hey, I get to have fun for the rest of my days. I get to just put my feet up, get me a cup of coffee, and just enjoy daytime television or the golf course or nonstop vacations." Well, if you follow most people that take that route, it's not a happy course. It's not a happy life. It's, in fact, a sure-fire way to depression and discouragement and to a sense of worthlessness and uselessness. No. Retirement, senior years call us to serve, to have the time and the opportunity and the ability that God gives us to serve his church, to serve our families, to serve our communities.

J. I. Packer is very strong in this. He says in his book that the importance of planning each and every day of our senior years because what he said was, he's seen most people in their senior years, they go to bed without a plan, they wake up without a plan, and the day has no plan, has no structure. Every day is the same, it just rolls one into another, and nothing is accomplished. He's saying, "You didn't do that in your unsenior years, so don't do it now." He says that whatever long-term plans we may have, we need to get into the habit of planning each day's business in advance, either first thing in the morning or better, I think, the day before. And he also emphasizes the opportunities that are now available to seniors, not least because of the increased health. He was saying when he was growing up, the idea of somebody living past 70 was pretty major. The idea of somebody actually being of any use in their 70s was an even more revolutionary idea. And yet now with increased longevity, people are living over 80 years of age on average, women 84, men just about 80, giving an extra 10 years, 15 years or so of opportunity to serve.

He says this, "Maintaining zeal God-ward as our bodies wear out is the special discipline to which we aging Christians are called. Realism requires us to remember that memory, particularly short-term memory, will weaken. Logical tightness of speech will loosen. Powers of concentration will diminish. Physical exhaustion will overtake us sooner or later and energy levels are going to keep getting lower. Zeal, however, should be unflagging every day, all day, and all the way, but if this is to happen, zeal must be fed by hope." He's calling seniors to a hope fed, a hope fueled zeal to the very end.

Fifth counsel is: finish your course with joy. Isn't that what the Apostle Paul said of his own end as he contemplated it? He uses the race image to emphasize this. Again, Packer puts it so well. He says, "The apostle's race image clearly combines these four ideas. First, clear-headed goal orientation. In other words, you run to win. Second, purposeful planning. You think out how you should run, pacing yourself and preparing for the final burst. Third, resolute concentration. You put everything second to training for running and hopefully winning the race. And fourth, supreme effort. You run flat-out, putting everything you've got into what you're doing. Thus Paul conceives a faithful Christian life. The believer runs, as did he, to finish his course and to finish it with joy."

Lastly, most importantly: prepare to die. Prepare to die. That's what all these weaknesses are giving us a foretaste of. That's what all these pains are predicting. It's like God putting a siren in our ears and blue lights in our eyes. He's saying, "Take heed. Be sensitive. Be aware of what's happening to your body and your mind because this is going to accelerate or come to a sudden end." So whatever else we use our senior years for, it's for this, to get ready to die. Yes, there's much we can do, much we can enjoy with our extra years, extra time, extra opportunities, many things we can enjoy with our wife or husband maybe, with our family, serving in the church, serving the community, but do not forget to prepare to die, to be ready for where these senior years are leading which is the end. Prepare by faith in Jesus Christ. Prepare by repentance toward God. Think daily upon your own death and act upon it, too.

Lastly, let me just conclude with just a few words to the young here and the first is: treat our seniors as individuals. It's very easy, I know, young people, we kind of look at other young people and we notice everything about them because there is so much change and change of appearance, change of fashions, change of interests, then you kind of look at old people, you take kind of a glance around the congregation and you think, "Well, they all just look the same. You know, they're kind of gray and old and they're not as colorful and bright and breezy and interesting maybe as we are." And so you tend to sort of view everyone as the same but every senior is an individual made in the image of God with unique characteristics, unique interests, unique abilities, unique wisdom. And so treat each senior here as an individual. Pause as you look at them. Pause to think about them. Pause to talk to them. Give them the respect that their years have given them in God's eyes. That's part of what's involved in honoring our father and our mother, also our grandfathers and our grandmothers, all those in superior positions or ages. Respect them. Seek them out for wisdom. They've got here having made many good decisions and many bad decisions that they have learned from and they can share with you. At least within your own family, seek out the seniors for counsel, for advice, for wisdom, for guidance.

Really work hard against ageism as strongly as against racism. It's so easy in our society where youth is idolized to really have an ageist attitude and regard older people as less, of less worth and value. That's certainly not the way God's word views them. And do remember, as I said at the beginning, you too, hopefully if God wills, will be a senior, and so you can prepare for that. Many seniors will tell you they didn't prepare, they weren't

ready, and suffered consequences as well so senior years were not what they might have been. But you have an opportunity to learn, to prepare, to be ready.

And lastly, young people, remember you may not reach senior years. God may take you away in your very young years or your middle years. None of us are guaranteed our senior years. You may think, "Well, I wait until later to get ready, to prepare to meet God." No, remember you are created in the days of your youth, said the writer of Ecclesiastes after describing all the onset of old age and all the impact of it, he calls them to, "Look, given the difficulties of old age, given the trials and the challenges, it's youth that you should use to seek the Lord and your Creator before these days come so that if these days do not come, you will come into God's presence with peace and confidence and hope." Remember your Creator, whether a senior or a junior. Remember him in faith. Remember him in repentance. Remember him in love. Remember him with service, with worship. Use this Psalm to bring you to the one who gave you life, who sustains you in life, and who will one day take that life away from you and call you to account for it. Amen.

Let's pray.