

# Reflections on 80 Years

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## Ashland Grace Church

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Now the sermon that I have prepared to preach for you this morning is a sermon I preached in 1986, 21 years ago. And the title of it was, "A Reflection of 60 Years." I just celebrated my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and I wanted to talk about those days.

Well, Doris put that sermon away, the outline and about three or four weeks ago she took it out. And she gave it to me and she said, "Why don't you preach now on reflection of 80 years?" That's a true story.

So I looked it over and I preached it. I preached it in Danville. I preached it in Fairmount, West Virginia. I am going to preach it to you this morning.

I was in a seminary class in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1950 and Dr. Lee Robinson was the president of the college there and teaching the class. I had been there two or three years. And I was sitting in his class and he said this. He said to his class of preachers, he said, "Now, men, repetition, repetition. Say it again. Say it again. Say it again." You can't say it too often because Paul said, "To write the same things to me is not grievous, but to you it is safe."

Well one of these preachers raised his hand and the old Dr. Robinson called on him. And he said...this is what he says. "Dr. Robinson, I don't intend to preach the same sermon over again."

It got real quiet in there and Dr. Robinson said, "Well, son, it could be that you will never preach a sermon worth preaching over again."

I hope this is one that is worth preaching over again.

Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 39. Here is the title, "A Reflection of 80 Years." Psalm 39. Let's start with verse four. "Lorddd, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth." That's not very long, is it? "All mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

A man said one time, "A man is always as young as he feels."

He said, "That may be true, but a man is never as important as he feels."

And David says that here, right here, verse six. “Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.” Help me to know how frail I am.

But, you know, it is always profitable. I find this to be true in speaking on this subject. It is always profitable in our last days to reflect on the passing of the years and to determine what we have learned. What have we learned in all these days?

Well, I’ll tell you this. As I reflect on these passing years I am thankful to arrive at the definite age that I am right now, 81 years old. I am thankful that I am that old. Do you know why? Because I am nearer home today than I have ever been before.

For me to live is Christ and to die is the best thing that could happen to me. Right now. That’s true at this age. You can’t say that yet. You have got too many responsibilities. But I don’t have but one responsibility and that’s to go home.

And the second thing that I have learned, it is necessary to grow old in order to grow in grace. The Lord has taught us as we grow older we are to grow in grace, to acquire some patience. That takes a long time. Tribulation worketh patience. To acquire some understanding and to learn to be charitable to others, learn to be charitable toward others.

One man said one time, “I see no fault in others that I don’t see in myself.”

Doris and I have visited John Newton’s home in England years ago. It was right across from him was William Cowper’s home and it was very, very moving to us to visit the home of those great preachers and song writers. But one day John Newton was sitting in that study where I was standing there that day. He was sitting there and I read this story years later. He was sitting in that study and William Jay walked in. You know who that is.

William Jay walked in and he said, “Mr. Newton, good news. John Smith has been converted.”

“Oh,” John Newton said, “I’m glad.”

William Jay said, “Mr. Newton, now that John Smith has been converted I will never despair of another man.”

Newton quietly said, “Mr. James, since the Lord saved me I’ve never despaired of anybody.”

That’s true. We don’t see any fault in others we don’t see in ourselves.

And then it is necessary to grow old, number one, that we may die. It is necessary to grow old that we may grow in grace. And it is necessary to grow older that we may obtain some wisdom, some maturity.

Peter said in his second epistle, he said, “May the God of all grace mature you, perfect you.” Do you remember reading? “The God of all grace perfect you, mature you, establish you, strengthen you and settle you.” And you can’t take any short cuts. May the God of all grace in due time, by his mercy and grace, may he mature you and establish you and settle you and strengthen you? And there is no shortcuts. The Scripture still teaches that we are babes, young men and elders. You can’t cut across.

Back in the navy they...when I was in the navy they had some...a special program for some college students. They would get men right out of college that had a degree and they had been to school and they put them in the navy and made them ensigns and gave them a 90 day course and in 90 days they became an officer. And we used to call them 90 day wonders.

Well, the Lord doesn’t have any 90 day wonders. It takes all the time the Lord gives us to grow in grace and maturity and get settled and so forth.

But here are my five reflections of 80 years. Here they are. I’ll give them to you. You can remember them, jot them down as you wish. Here they are.

The first one is this. Turn with me to James chapter four verse 13. “Go to now, you that say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain.’ Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? What is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vainisheth away. What is your life?”

What is your life? Number one, it is vapor. It is a vapor. It is very short. Life is a vapor. What is a vapor? It is a mist. You walk out of your house on a cold morning and you blow your breath in the air. There it goes and it is gone. Just a mist, just a vapor, here for a while and then disappears.

Job said this. “We are a few days and full of trouble.” And trouble and sorrow goes together always. We are a few days and full of trouble. Sin and trouble go together.

And then life is a shadow. Job said this. He said, “Life is a shadow.”

What is a shadow? Well, a shadow is an empty thing. The light shines behind you and there is a shadow and it is an empty thing, an empty thing that has no substance. You see it, but there is nothing there.

And then, also, life is a shadow because it doesn’t last very long. It is soon gone. And then life is a shadow—watch this—it leaves no mark. It’s gone.

Isn't that something? Life is a vapor, a mist. Life is a shadow, here today, gone in a moment. And it leaves no mark where it was.

People want to leave their names on all these things, you know. Remember me.

Not for long!

And then life is a flower. Job said, "Life is a flower." Why is it like a flower? Well, it comes from another flower, the seed of another flow. I came from my daddy. You came from yours.

And then flowers come from the ground. My daddy came from the ground. Adam was my daddy.

And flowers bloom for a while and they are beautiful for a while and then they what? Wither, wither and die. And then what happens? Back to the ground.

Isn't that something? So teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart to Christ who is wisdom. Lord, teach me, teach me to seek thee while you may be found and to call upon thee while thou art near.

You know? Let me tell you something. The Bible does not say that a man can't seek God. No, it doesn't. It says he won't. He should, but he can if he will. The Scripture tells us this. "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart."

Seek ye the Lord while may be found. Call upon him while he is near.

That's my first reflection. Life is short. It is a vapor. It is a shadow. It is just a flower that blooms today. It comes from another flower and it goes back to the grave. It doesn't leave any mark when it is gone. It's just that way. That's it.

Now here is my second reflection. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Turn to Romans eight. Brother Frank has been teaching us that chapter for two or three weeks. Oh, three or four weeks, Romans chapter eight. And I want you to turn with me to Romans eight verse 28, Romans 8 verse 28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

You know, my friends, like the apostle Paul I grew up in religion just like he did, a religion of works. And then I met Christ. When Brother Barnard came to Pollard Baptist Church in 1950, April 1950, I left Chattanooga and Doris and I moved back to Ashland. And I heard him preach that Tuesday morning...Monday and Tuesday morning. And when he asked me to quote Romans 8:28, you know, I told you about that. You have heard it before and I got up and I said there, "We know that all things work together for good to them who love God." And I sat down. And he just stood there and looked at me.

And he said, "What's the rest of it? Do you know the rest of it?"

There wasn't anybody there but me and him, you know, as far as... He ignored the rest of the people. And I got up and I said, "And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

That's it. That are called according to his purpose. Everything God does is on purpose. That's right. And I saw right there in that meeting, those two weeks, I saw the majesty of God. I was in religion all these years. I was pastor of a church for three years in Chattanooga while I went to school. But I didn't know God. I didn't know the gospel. And I met God. I saw the majesty, the lordship of Jesus Christ. I saw the fall and ruin of mankind. I learned the great confession of faith.

"Brother Mahan, what's the great confession of faith?"

Well, turn to it. Turn to Ephesians chapter one. Here is the great confession of faith. Here is what I learned, Ephesians chapter one. Listen to it. Verse three. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

That's the great confession of faith. That is what I learned. I learned how God could be just and justifier. I learned how that salvation is not an offer. It is a gift. That salvation is not by chance. It is by choice. That salvation is not our will, if you will. It is by the will of God. Salvation is of the Lord.

Dr. MacGruder was a son of a preacher in Missouri, Joplin, Missouri a long time ago. And Dr. MacGruder's daddy preached the gospel of grace and Dr. MacGruder went into daddy's study one day. MacGruder was always a smart man, intelligent. And even as a youth he went in his dad's study and he said, "Father, I don't understand how God can hate Esau. God is love."

Do you know what the old man said? He wrote, "Son..." I wrote it down. "Son, when you learn God's Word and see God's holiness you will understand how God could hate Esau. The thing you are going to have a problem with is how can God love Jacob. And if you ever find that out you will see the grace of God."

Old brother Herringdean knew. Do you remember brother Herringdean? Some of you do. Well years when I met him I was...when we had our first sovereign grace conference I was 28 years old and brother Barnard was 52 and brother Walker was about 80 and brother Herringdean was about 75 and brother Mews was 64 and I was just a kid, but I learned something from those fellows. And brother Herringdean told me how that he met

Arthur Pink in 1920, 21, 22, 23, 24, right in there. The year I was born, 1926, brother Herringdean wrote the first of brother Herringdean printed the first *Sovereignty of God* book in his printing shop in 1926, the year I was born. Arthur Pink wrote it and Herringdean printed it. But Herringdean didn't know the gospel of grace. This is back in the 20s.

And brother Arthur Pink wrote Herringdean and Herringdean was in Cleveland, Ohio and he was running a print shop and things like that. And he was a strong prophecy person. He didn't know grace. And Pink wrote to him and said, "I want you to print a book for me called *The Sovereignty of God*."

And brother Herringdean said, "I wrote him back and said, 'What is...what do you mean by sovereignty of God?'"

And brother Pink wrote him back one verse of Scripture, John 6:44, "No man can come to me except my Father which sent me draw him and he that is drawn of God and taught of God cometh unto me."

And Herringdean said, "I saw what he was talking about. God is on the throne. God is sovereign."

And in that time they printed that first book, 1926, *The Sovereignty of God*. And it has gone all over the world. But Herringdean and I became good friends in 1952 and he helped me begin the sovereign grace conference, the first one in Ashland in 1954. We became very close friends.

Now here is my third reflection. Life is short. Salvation is of the Lord. And, thirdly, Christ is all. Christ is all.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter five. Christ is all and in all and we are complete in him. You know that. That's just so. We...my friends, we don't come to the doctrines of grace. We come to Christ. We don't come to a doctrine. We come to a person. We don't learn a system of theology. We learn of him.

"Learn of me," he said, "Learn of me."

We don't just believe there is a God. We believe God. Abraham didn't just believe there is a God. Abraham believed God. How do I know he believed God? He obeyed him. That's just so.

Look at here in 2 Corinthians chapter five verse 17. "Therefore if any man be in Christ," not in the doctrine, not in theology, in Christ, "he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things in Christ are become new." If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. That is what that word is, creation. He is not the old man reformed. He is not the old man with a new doctrine. He is not the old man with a new lifestyle. He is a new man in Christ Jesus. That is what Ephesians four says.

Turn over to Ephesians chapter four. Ephesians the fourth chapter verse 21. He is a new man, a new person. Ephesians 4:21. Listen. Verse 20. Ephesians 4:20. "But you have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Christ that you put off concerning the former behavior, conversation, the old man. Put him off, that old man which is corrupt according to deceitful lust. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind and thoughts and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and holiness. Old things are passed away." Not all old things. They gradually die. But the new things are in Christ.

The old family in Adam is dead. The old curse of the law is gone. The old righteousness is gone. We were in Christ and be found in him. The old ways, the old walk, the old pride, the old companions are put away. And we are a new man in Christ Jesus.

Life is short. Salvation is of the Lord. Christ is all. All and in all. And, number four, God will provide. God will provide. Turn to Psalm 37. God will provide.

I have learned that through the years, that God will provide for his people.

In Psalm 37 listen to this verse 23. "The steps of a good man, a believer, a righteous man, a new man, are ordered by the Lord. They are established by the Lord. They are planned and purposed by the Lord and he delights in his way. Though he fall, he will not be utterly cast down. For the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young and now I am old." And I am talking about myself right here. "I have been young and now I am old and yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken. You are not going to see them forsaken. And I will not see his seed begging bread."

I was in the navy. I didn't know Doris. I was in the navy. She went to Bob Jones College. Her mother wanted her to marry a preacher. And so she went to Bob Jones College. She married one, but her mother didn't have me in mind, you know. I came back from the navy and we met and I fell in love with her and I hope she fell in love with me. I believe she did. And we married, too soon. I was just home from the navy six months and we got engaged and we married and she worked at the church. She was church secretary. We had a big Baptist Church. My dad was a deacon. Her dad was a deacon and I taught the young person's class and things like that, you know, after I came out of the navy.

So we married and I got a job at the steel mill where my dad worked and where her dad worked. And she worked at the church. And we moved in with our parents. Didn't have any...no furniture, no car, nothing. We just had love, you know. And you can live on that just so long, you know. But we moved in with our parents and the assistant pastor in our whole church lived across the street. He was a young man, a single man.

He came over one day. We were all sitting in the living room and this was about March of 1947. We had been married four months. He came in and he said, "Henry," he said, "There is a pastor friend of mine, Don Wells, in Ashland, Kentucky that wants a song leader and a youth director." And he said, "He asked me to..." He went to Bob Jones.

Doris knew him when she was there. There were classmates. He said, "He wants a song leader and a youth director and I don't want to go. Do you want to go?"

I said, "Me?" That's the way I felt. "Me? I never led a song in my life."

He said, "I'll teach you."

"Well," I said, "We'll think about it."

So he came over at different days and he'd teach me to lead the singing and these things so about two weeks later we caught a train and went to Ashland and met with Don Wells. And he...Doris sang for him. That's what did it. She could sing like a bird, you know. And he sang for her and he hired us. And so we went back to home and got all our clothes and didn't have anything else, but just our clothing. So she quit her job and I quit my job and we got on the train and came to Ashland, came to that railroad station right down the road here in the last part of March 1947.

Got off the train and Don got us a two room apartment with Mr. and Mrs. Abbott down about three blocks from the Church, Pollard Baptist Church. And that's where we lived and that's where I met Sharon and all those young people, you know, that are still my friends and buddies and Don Pfitzer and Russell May and all of them, you know. And I had a youth club, Uncle Henry's Bible Club. And we just had some good times. Didn't know anything, but we had a good time. Didn't know any gospel at all.

But after six months I told Don, I said, "I got to go back to school. If I am going to be a song leader and a youth director and a preacher I got to go to school." So he had me preach my first sermon. And so we left, went to Chattanooga. And the government paid all my tuition, books and gave me \$95 a month. And we rented a furnished house. We didn't have any furniture. We rented a furnished house, moved in. What did we pay for the house? Ninety-five dollars a month.

Mr. Robinson said, "You can't live on \$95 a month if you're giving it all to rent."

I said, "I plan to preach and lead the singing." And they'd find places for me to lead the singing and give me \$25. We took in a border, too, another student. And got along fine for about two months. And the president of the school called me and said, "I want you to go to the Oakwood Baptist Church and preach next Sunday." It is one of the oldest churches in Chattanooga, 1848. It was founded...it was a place where the confederate soldiers had a hospital.

And so I went and preached my second sermon to them. And the pulpit committee wasn't there and they said, "Won't you come back next Sunday?"

I came back next Sunday and preached my third sermon. And the pulpit committee still wasn't there. I came back the fourth Sunday and they said this. "Why don't you be our pastor until we find one?"



So I was their pastor for about two months and they called me and we bought our furniture and moved into the parsonage and I preached there three years. And then I learned the gospel. I came back to Ashland and learned the gospel.

I tell you. God will provide. He will provide for his people. Always has and always will provide.

They had a big split over the gospel of grace at Ashland Church, Pollard Baptist Church, 1955. It split. And I resigned that Sunday morning and 45 men, 46 women and 20 some odd young people moved out. And I was standing at the front of the church when I resigned and the people were standing around. And a man came walking up to me, Lawrence Gilley, your neighbor, Sharon, lived across the street from you. Lawrence Gilley came up to me and handed me a check for \$1500. He said, "Here is the first offering on the new church."

And I said, "Mr. Gilley," I said, "We're going to meet in a Armco..." What do they call those things? Shelter house, Armco shelter house. "You take this money. I don't know whether we are going to have a church or not. I just don't know."

Well, he rang my bell. He said, "Take the check. Take that \$1500 and if you don't find a church get out of town on that \$1500."

God will provide. He always will. Always will. Always will provide.

Somebody wrote a poem one time.

Though troubles assail and dangers afright,  
Though friends shall all fail and foes all unite,  
One thing assures us whatever betide.  
His promise guarantees us that he will provide.

The birds without barns or storehouse are fed.  
From them let us learn to trust for our bread.  
His saints what is fitting shall never be denied,  
As long as it is written, "The Lord will provide."

No strength of our own nor goodness we claim,  
Our trust is all thrown on Jesus' dear name.  
In this strong tower for safety we hide,  
The Lord is my keeper and he will provide.

When life sinks a pace and death is in view,  
The Word of his promise will comfort us through.  
Not fearing, not doubting with Christ as our guide,  
I plan to die shouting, "The Lord will provide."

He always will. He always has.

I had a friend. This lady, Burnelle, came to the first sovereign grace conference, 1954. Mrs. Burnelle Spears, Mrs. Powers and Miss Bunn. They stayed with Russell May, I believe. And she just fell in love with the gospel of grace. This lady did, Burnelle. And she came to every conference. Her husband didn't give a flip to the preaching or the conference or anything else, but she came. And he died. And she married again a Mr. Firth. And she kept...but he wouldn't come to service. He never would...came to a meeting. He died. She married the third one, Mr. Jackson. And she wrote me a letter.

And she said, "Brother Mahan," she said, "Pray for me." She said, "I am just down in the dumps." She was living over in Richmond, Virginia. "I am just down in the dumps, you know, and my husband...none of them have ever come to church, none of them have ever loved God and I'm just so..."

I wrote her back. I wrote, "Burnelle, you have got yourself in this proposition. I warned you about marrying these unsaved people. Now you are just going to have to make your bed and lie in it and quit complaining and finding fault with God or me or anybody else and just forget it. That's the last thing I got to say to you."

I thought we're done. Not if you love God. Just a little while later I got a letter from her and she said, "I own a piece of property. I am going to sell it for \$300,000 and I want to will it to you and the elders and this man is going to pay for it \$2000 a month until he paid off \$300,000 and you can help support the missionaries with that \$2000 a month."

God will provide. He always has. He always will. God will provide if we are his.

And I want to tell you something else. Doris and I prayed and sought the will and leadership of the Lord in moving to Rocky Mount to be near Paul and Mim. We are getting old and we'd like to be where our children are and doctors and hospitals and all these things, rest home or whatever God orders for us. We need to be where our children are. And so we went over there. We prayed about it and sought the Lord's will in this matter and it took a long time. But finally we got on the same page and we are going.

So we went over there. We put our house up for sale on Saturday and it sold on Tuesday. That is evidence of God. And then we went down to Rocky Mount and met with Paul and I found out that houses there are a lot more expensive than they are here, a whole lot more expensive. And so we... Paul took us around to show us different houses that he wanted us to live near him, you know. And we just sat down. I said, "Paul, I can't afford these houses. There is no way in this world that I can afford a house that you have been looking at."

He said, "Dad, a friend," he wouldn't tell me who it is, "A friend who loves you very much, who has known you for many, many years told me to tell you to get your house, pay for it what you have and I will finish the rest of it." So that's how we got such a nice

place to live in Rocky Mount. God will provide. He always has and he always will. He always will. His servants are just special to him.

I want you to turn to the book of Job and I'll close. I have preached too long, but this may be the last shot. It could be, you know.

Job chapter five. Job the fifth chapter, verse 26. Now watch this carefully. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age." Just look at that for a minute. Our death is inevitable, isn't it? You are going to come to your grave. That's where we are headed, to the grave. It is appointed to man once to die. You are going to come to your grave. In Adam all die.

Well, now watch this. He said, "You shall come to your grave." The believer's death is not only inevitable, but it is acceptable. You are going to come. He is not going to drive you. You are not going against your will. We are willing to die. We choose to be absent from the body, Paul said, and to be present with the Lord. That is our goal. We are not forced to leave this earth. We are willingly. Paul said, "I am in a straight betwixt the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better."

I shall come.

The unbeliever, he is not coming. He will fight it till the last day. And the Lord said this about unbelief. He said this. "Thy soul shall be required of thee." Going to take it away.

We're not going to take it...He is not going to take it. We are going to give it. That's right. He will come to you, to your grave.

Watch this third thing. In a full age the believer's death is inevitable, it is acceptable, it is timely. When am I going to die? When the Lord wills it. That's right.

"Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age."

What is a full age? As long as he gives me. He gave my son 21 years. He gave my daughter 42 years. He has given me 81. This may be the end. In a full age.

Do you know what somebody said about that? If corn is harvested before it is ripe it is not fit for use. If corn is left in a field too long it will come to nothing, but when his purpose for us on this earth in his Church is finished and complete we will be plucked from the field and seated at the table of the marriage feast, a full age, in the Lord's good time.

And then look at this. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." Like he comes in his season. "Lo, this have I found, so it is." Hear it and know thou it for your good." It's good. It's good. It's good.

You quoted a Scripture in your message, Frank, last...week before last or last week. "It is good for me I have been afflicted that I might learn his statutes. It is good for me."

Well, I hope that is a blessing to you. And I am thankful for the Lord's mercies and grace and love... My love for you goes back a long ways and your friendship and fellowship is just unbelievable. I am grateful.

So we will bow for prayer.

*Our merciful, faithful Father, you have taught us and we believe you. This life is a vapor soon to be gone. But we know that our life is hid with thee in Christ Jesus. We know that salvation is your gift to us in Christ and we know that Christ is all and in all and we are complete in him. And, Lord, we are so grateful and so thankful you have provided for us all the days of our lives. You have blessed us and provided for us and we do love thee. We believe thee and we rest in thee and we know that there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness in Christ Jesus not only for us, but for all them that love thy appearing. Lord, we are grateful. We give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*