

Growing Older Together

A Catholic Guide To Family Happiness

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MANY changes occur as we grow older. Physical weakness saps our vigor. A look in the mirror reveals new wrinkles and a gradual loss of hair color - even of hair. We may suffer some memory failure. New relationships develop when the children marry, and again when grandchildren arrive. For some, retirement from secular work results in a different routine of life.

In truth, advancing years can be trialsome. (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 contains a very dismal but accurate portrait of old age, as it was experienced before the coming of Our Saviour. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years draw nigh of which you shall say: 'They please me not': Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain: When the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall stagger, and the grinders shall be idle in a small number, and they that look through the holes shall be darkened: And they shall shut the doors in the street, when the grinder's voice shall be low, and they shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall grow deaf. And they shall fear high things, and they shall be afraid in the way, the almond tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat, and the caper tree shall be destroyed: because man shall go into the house of his eternity, and the mourners shall go round about in the street. Before the silver cord be broken, and the golden fillet shrink back, and the pitcher be crushed at the fountain, and the wheel be broken upon the cistern, And the dust return into its earth, from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it. 'Vanity of vanities', said Ecclesiastes, [the Preacher, Qoheleth,] 'and all things are vanity'.") Still, consider God's servants in Bible times. Although they finally succumbed to death, they gained both wisdom and understanding, which brought them great satisfaction in old age. (See Genesis 25:8 for Abraham; Genesis 35:29 for Isaac; and see Job 42:16-17 for the Patriarch Job) Job 12: 12 tells us: "In the ancient [the elderly] is wisdom, and in length of days prudence." How did they succeed in growing older happily? Surely it was by living in harmony with the principles that we today find recorded in the Bible.

- Psalm 119:105 reminds us, [it is Psalm 118: 105 in the Vulgate,] "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths." 2 Timothy 3:16&17 remind us: "All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, That the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work." Every part of divine scripture is certainly profitable for all these ends. But, if we would have the whole rule of Christian faith and practice, we must not be content with those Scriptures, which Timothy knew from his infancy, that is, with the Old Testament alone: nor yet with the New Testament, without taking along with it the traditions of the apostles, and the interpretation of the church, to which the apostles delivered both the book, and the true meaning of it.

Review Questions.

- (a) What changes occur as old age approaches?
- (b) How did godly men of Bible times find satisfaction in old age?

GROWING OLDER TOGETHER.

In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul offered sound guidance to those who are getting older. He wrote: "That the aged men be sober, chaste, prudent, sound in faith, in love, in patience. The aged women, in like manner, in holy attire [religious], not false accusers, not given to much wine, teaching well." (Titus 2: 2-3) Heeding these words can help you to face the challenges of growing older.

Review Questions. What counsel did Paul give for older men and women?

ADAPT TO YOUR CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENCE.

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

Changing roles call for adaptability. How true this proves to be when adult children leave home and get married! For many parents this is the first reminder that they are getting old. Though happy that their offspring have come of age, parents often worry about whether they did all they could to prepare the children for independence. And they may miss having them around the house.

Understandably, parents continue to concern themselves with the welfare of their children, even after the children leave home. "If I could only hear from them often, to reassure myself that they are all right-that would make me happy," said one mother. A father relates: "When our daughter left home, it was a very difficult time. It left a great gap in our family because we had always done everything together." How have these parents coped with the absence of their children? In many cases, by reaching out and helping other people.

Review Question. How do many parents react when their children leave home, and how do some adjust to the new situation?

When children get married, the role of the parents changes. Genesis 2:24 states: "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to [stick to] his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh." A recognition of the godly principles of headship and good order will help parents to keep things in their proper perspective. - 1 Corinthians 11:3 teaches: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." 1 Corinthians 14:33 states: "For God is not the God of dissension, but of peace: as also I teach in all the churches of the saints." Finally 1 Corinthians 14:40 reminds us: "But let all things be done decently, and according to order."

Review Question. What helps to keep family relationships in their proper perspective?

GROWING OLDER TOGETHER.

After a couple's two daughters married and moved away, the couple felt a void in their lives. At first, the husband resented his sons-in-law. But as he reflected on the principle of headship, he realized that his daughters' husbands were now responsible for their respective households. Therefore, when his daughters requested advice, he asked them what their husbands thought, and

then he made sure to be as supportive as possible. His sons-in-law now view him as a friend and welcome his counsel.

Review Question. What fine attitude did one father cultivate when his daughters left home to get married?

What if newlyweds, while not doing anything unscriptural or in breach of any of God's commands, fail to do what the parents think is best? "We always help them to see God our Father's point of view," explain one couple who have married children, "but if we do not agree with a decision of theirs, we accept it and give them our support and encouragement."

In certain Asian lands, some mothers find it particularly difficult to accept their sons' independence. However, if they respect Christian order and headship, they find that friction with their daughters-in-law is minimized. One good Catholic Christian woman finds that the departure of her sons from the family home has been a "source of ever-increasing gratitude." She is thrilled to see their ability to manage their new households. In turn, this has meant a lightening of the physical and mental load that she and her husband have to bear as they get older.

Review Question. How have some parents adapted to the independence of their grown children?

HANDY HINT.

As you grow older, reaffirm your love for each other.

REINVIGORATING YOUR MARRIAGE BOND.

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

People react in various ways to reaching middle age. Some men dress differently in an attempt to appear younger. Many women worry about the changes that menopause brings. Sadly, some middle-aged persons provoke their mates to resentment and jealousy by flirting with younger members of the opposite sex. Godly older men, though, are "sound in mind," or "prudent" curbing improper desires. (1 Peter 4:7 says: "But the end of all is at hand. Be prudent therefore, and watch in prayers.") Mature women likewise work to maintain the stability of their marriages, out of love for their husbands and a desire to please God our Heavenly Father.

Under inspiration, King Lemuel (or Lamuel) of Massa recorded praise for the "capable wife", the "perfect wife", the "valiant woman", who rewards her husband "with good, and not evil, all the days of her life." A Christian husband will not fail to appreciate how his wife strives to cope with any emotional upset she experiences during her middle years. His love will prompt him to "praise her." - Proverbs 31:10, 12 & 28 contain the thoughts. "Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her... She will render him good, and not evil, all the days of her life... Her children rose up, and called her blessed: her husband too, and he praised her."

Review Question. What Scriptural counsel will help people avoid some of the snares of middle age?

GROWING OLDER TOGETHER.

During the busy child-rearing years, both of you may have gladly put aside your personal desires to attend to your children's needs. After their departure it is time to re-focus your married life.

"When my daughters left home," says one husband, "I began courtship with my wile all over again." Another husband says: "We keep an eye on each other's health and remind each other of the need

for exercise." So as not to feel lonely, he and his wife show hospitality to other members of the parish congregation. Yes, showing interest in others brings blessings. Moreover, it pleases God our Father. - Philippians 2:4-5 says: "Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's. For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Hebrews 13:2 says: "And hospitality do not forget; for by this some, being not aware of it, have entertained angels." Hebrews 13:16 adds: "And do not forget to do good, and to impart (share); for by such sacrifices God's favour is obtained."

Review Question. How can couples grow closer together as the years pass?

Do not allow a communication gap to develop between you and your spouse. Talk together freely. (Proverbs 17:27 reminds us: "He that sets bounds to his words is knowing and wise: and the man of understanding is of a precious spirit.") 'We deepen our understanding of each other by caring and being considerate,' comments one husband. His wife agrees, saying: 'As we have grown older, we have come to enjoy having tea together, conversing, and cooperating with each other.' Your being open and honest can help cement your marriage bond, giving it a resilience that will thwart the attacks of Satan, the great marriage wrecker.

Review Question. What part do openness and honesty play as a couple grow older together?

ENJOY YOUR GRANDCHILDREN.

Grandchildren are "the crown" of the elderly. (Proverbs 17:6 says: "Children's children are the crown of old men: and the glory of children are their fathers.")

The companionship of grandchildren can truly be a delight - lively and refreshing. The Bible speaks well of Lois, a grandmother who, with her daughter Eunice, shared her beliefs and faith with her infant grandson Timothy. This youngster grew up knowing that both his mother and his grandmother valued Bible truth, the gospel of their savior, Jesus Christ and the faith of the Catholic Church in its infancy years. - 2 Timothy 1:5 & 3:14-15 tell us: "Calling to mind that faith which is in you unfeigned, which also dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and I am certain that in you also... But continue you in those things which you have learned, and which have been committed to you: knowing of whom you have learned them. And because from your infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which can instruct you to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Review Question. What part did Timothy's grandmother evidently play in his growing up as a Christian?

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

Here, then, is a special area in which grand-parents can make a most valuable contribution. Grandparents, you have already shared your knowledge of God our Father's purposes with your children. You did your best to impart to them the precious gift of the Catholic Faith. Now you can do likewise with yet another generation! Many young children thrill to hear their grandparents recount Bible stories. Of course, you do not take over the father's responsibility to inculcate Bible truths and the Catholic Faith in his children. (Deuteronomy 6:7, you'll recall, tells Jewish fathers "and you shall tell them (the words of God's promises and laws) to your children, and you shall meditate upon them sitting in your house, and walking on your journey, on sleeping and rising.") Rather, you complement this. May your prayer be that of the Psalmist: "And unto old age and grey hairs: O God, forsake me not, Until I show forth Your arm, to all the generation that is to come,

along with Your power." - Psalm 71:18. (It's Psalm 70: 18 in the Vulgate.) Meanwhile, Psalm 78:5-6 (Psalm .77: 5-6 in the Vulgate) says: "And he set up a testimony in Jacob: and made a law in Israel. How great the things he commanded our fathers, that they should make the same known to their children: That another generation might know them. The children that should be born and should rise up, and declare them to their children." If, sadly, your own children have neglected the Faith, you still need to PRAY for them and your grand-children. And also to lovingly tell your grand-children that the greatest gift they could give you is to embrace the Catholic Faith with fervor and so ensure their eternal salvation. Lead by your holy example and devotion, your love and compassion for all God's people.

Review Question. With regard to grandchildren, what valuable contribution can grandparents make, but what should they avoid?

Sadly, some grandparents so spoil the little ones that tensions develop between the grandparents and their grown children. However, your sincere kindness may perhaps make it easy for your grandchildren to confide in you when they do not feel inclined to reveal matters to their parents. Sometimes the youngsters hope that their indulgent grandparents will side with them against their parents. What then? Exercise wisdom and encourage your grandchildren to be open with their parents.

You can explain that this pleases God our Father very much. (Ephesians 6:1-3 tells us: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just. Honour your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: That it may be well with you, and you may be long lived upon earth".) If necessary, you may volunteer to pave the way for the youngsters' approach by speaking with their parents. Be frank with your grandchildren about what you have learned over the years. Your honesty and candor can benefit them.

Review Question. How can grandparents avoid being the cause of strain developing in their family?

ADJUST AS YOU AGE.

GROWING OLDER TOGETHER.

As the years roll by, you will find that you cannot do all that you used to or all that you want to. How does one come to terms with the aging process? In your mind you may feel 30 years old, but a glance in the mirror betrays a different reality. Do not be discouraged. The psalmist beseeched the Lord God our Father: "Cast me not off in the time of old age: when my strength shall fail, do not You forsake me." Make it your resolve to imitate the psalmist's determination. He said: "But I will always hope; and will add to all Your praise." – The quotes are from Psalm 71:9 and 14. [Psalm 70: 9 and 14 in the Vulgate.]

Review Question. What determination of the psalmist should aging Christians imitate?

Many have prepared in advance to increase their praise to God our Father after retirement from secular work. "I planned ahead what I would do when our daughter left school," explains one father who is now retired. "I determined that I would start full-time volunteer work within the Church. My wife was seriously considering full-time volunteer work in the Missions and preaching ministry. In the end, we found heaps of work needing to be done in our local parish with the catechists and the Legion of Mary and lots of other parish apostolates. So I sold my business in order to be free to serve God our Father more fully. I prayed for God's direction." If you are nearing the age of retirement, draw comfort from the declaration of our Grand Creator and loving God: "Even to your

old age I am the same, and to your grey hairs I will carry you: I have made you, and I will bear you: I will carry and will save.” - Isaiah 46:4.

Review Question. How can a mature Christian make valuable use of retirement?

Adapting to retirement from secular work may not be easy. The apostle Paul counseled aged men to be "moderate in habits", that is sober and prudent. This calls for general restraint, not giving in to the inclination to seek a life of ease. There may be an even greater need for a routine and self-discipline after retirement than before. Be busy, then. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you all steadfast and unmoveable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58) Widen out your activities to help others. (2 Corinthians 6:13 says: "But having the same recompense, (I speak as to my children,) be you also enlarged.") Many Christians do this by zealously preaching the good news, bearing witness to Christ by their actions, being as heavily involved in parish life as possible, but at an adjusted pace to suit their increasing age and decreasing health and by improving their prayer life. As you grow older, be "healthy and sound in faith, in love, in patience and endurance." - Titus 2:2 says: "That the aged men be sober, chaste, prudent, sound in faith, in love, in patience.

Review Question. What counsel is given by Saint Paul for those who are growing old?

HANDLING THE LOSS OF YOUR SPOUSE.

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

It is a sad but true fact that, as a result of Original Sin, in the present system of things, married couples are eventually separated by death. Bereaved Catholic spouses know that their loved ones are now in God's hands. Christian tradition has often called this a 'sleeping' with the Lord, and thus our frequent prayer for the deceased is that they "rest in peace". They are confident that they will see them again. (We learn much from Our Lord's raising of Lazarus in John chapter 11. In verse 11 our Lord Jesus says: "Lazarus our friend sleeps; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." In verse 25 we have Christ's solemn affirmation: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in me, although he be dead, yet shall he live.") But the loss is still grievous. How can the surviving one deal with it?

How can the surviving one deal with the grief of a lost spouse?

Bearing in mind what a certain Bible character did will help. Anna was widowed after only seven years of marriage, and when we read of her, she was 84 years old. We can be sure that she grieved when she lost her husband. How did she cope? She rendered sacred service to the Lord God at the temple night and day. (Luke 2:36-38 contains the beautiful story which is part of every meditation of the fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years; who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day. Now she, at the same hour, coming in, confessed to the Lord; and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel.") Anna's life of prayerful service was undoubtedly a great antidote to the sorrow and loneliness she felt as a widow.

Review Questions.

(a) In the present system of things, what must eventually separate a married couple?

(b) How does Anna provide a fine example for bereaved spouses?

GROWING OLDER TOGETHER.

"The biggest challenge for me has been having no partner to talk to," explains a 72-year-old woman who was widowed ten years ago. "My husband was a good listener. We would talk about the parish work, about our friends in the congregation. We would discuss the homily together and share times of prayer. We would plan and evaluate our share in the Christian ministry of work that needed to be done to spread the good news of Jesus. We would talk of the Apostolate, of the St Vincent De Paul and the Legion of Mary. I still miss him very much. I find it really useful to be more involved in the parish gospel groups now. It provides something of what I miss most about him." Another widow says: "Although time heals, I have found it more accurate to say that it is what one does with one's time that helps one to heal. You are in a better position to help others." A 67-year-old widower agrees, saying: "A wonderful way to cope with bereavement is to give of yourself in comforting others."

Review Question. How have some widows and widowers coped with loneliness?

VALUED BY GOD IN OLD AGE.

Though death takes away a beloved mate, God our Father remains ever faithful, ever sure. "One thing I have asked of the Lord," sang King David of old, "this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. That I may see the delight of the Lord, and may visit his temple." - Psalm 27:4. [It is Psalm 26:4 in the Vulgate.] There is nothing more wonderful than to be able to participate in the regular celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

"Honour widows, that are widows indeed," urges the apostle Saint Paul. (1 Timothy 5:3.) The counsel that follows this instruction indicates that worthy widows without close relatives may have needed material support from the congregation of the Church. Nevertheless, the sense of the instruction to "honour" includes the idea of valuing them. What comfort godly widows and widowers can draw from the knowledge that God our Father values them and will sustain them! – Remember Saint James' instruction in James 1:27: "Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation: and to keep one's self unspotted from this world."

Review Question. What great comfort does the Bible give for aged ones, particularly those who have been widowed?

FAMILY HAPPINESS.

"Old age and white hairs are a crown of dignity, when it is found in the ways of justice," God's inspired Word declares. (Proverbs 16: 31) It says also: "The joy of young men is their strength: and the dignity of old men, their grey hairs." Proverbs 20: 29. Let's repeat it to ourselves: "when it is found in the way of justice and righteousness." Continue, then, whether married or single once again, to keep the service of God our Father's first in your life. Serve Him. Follow the teaching of His Son, Our Divine Lord Jesus and live the full Catholic sacramental life. You will thus have a good name with God now and the guaranteed prospect of eternal life in Heaven, a place where the pains of old age will be no more.

- Psalm 37:3-5 [it is Psalm 36: 3-5 in the Vulgate] makes this point about God our Father fulfilling our deepest desires by saying; "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the

land, and you shall be fed with its riches. Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the requests of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it.”

Isaiah 65:20 makes a similar point by describing an earthly paradise for those who do God’s will: “There shall no more be an infant of only a few days there, nor an old man that shall not fill up his days: for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the man being a hundred years old and dying shall be accursed as a sign of sin.” Catholics know that these prophecies point to the eternal bliss of Heaven. We look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. We know that we have not here on earth a permanent city but we look for one to come. We eagerly await the return of Our Lord Jesus. We pray, “Come, Lord Jesus”. Our anticipation is for the bodily resurrection which will accompany the General Judgment. With Joy we await the ‘new heavens and new earth which Christ has promised.

Review Question. What goal still remains for the elderly?

HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP...

COUPLES AS THEY GROW OLDER?

Grandchildren are a "crown" for older folk. - Proverbs 17:6.

Old age may bring added opportunities to serve God our Father. - Psalm 71:9 and 14. [Psalm 70: 9 and 14 in the Vulgate.]

Older ones are encouraged to be "moderate in habits."

They are to be “sober, chaste, prudent, and sound in faith.” - Titus 2:2.

Bereaved spouses, although deeply grieved, can find comfort in the Bible. - John 11:11, 25.

God our Father values faithful older ones. -Proverbs 16:31.
