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*Aging Successfully  
Right to the End*

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# AGING SUCCESSFULLY RIGHT TO THE END

## Introduction

1. Two stories
2. Ars Moriendi
3. The goal is to come to the end of life in a way that displays the glory of God.
  - a. Peter: “This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God” (John 21:19).
  - b. Paul: “Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20).
  - c. Run the race well to the finish line.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).
  - d. I recognize that the end of the race is not always easy
    - i. The 26.2-mile marathon
    - ii. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
4. Life and death
  - a. Life
    - i. Sanctity of life
      1. God’s image

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

        - a. Protected by God

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Genesis 9:6).
        - b. Not destroyed by sin

“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9).

2. God breathed life into humans.  
“...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7).
3. Inherent dignity of all human beings
- ii. Physical life is not the ultimate value.
  1. Life in Scripture is not so much about our cells functioning, our hearts beating, and lungs breathing.
  2. Life is about an eternal relationship with God.  
“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).
- iii. We err when we place too much value on earthly life.
  1. I am prolife but not antideath.
  2. It is wrong to take life that God is giving.
  3. Equally it is wrong to refuse to give up life that he is taking.

#### b. Death

- i. Death was not part of God’s good creation.
- ii. It came as a result of sin and the fall.  
“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).
- iii. Death became the universal experience for all humans.  
“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned—” (Romans 5:12).
- iv. Death became something to fear.  
“All those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:15).
- v. Death became an enemy.  
“The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).
- vi. But death is a defeated enemy in Christ.  
“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).
- vii. Must maintain those in healthy tension.
- viii. Death for the Christian must not be seen as an end but a beginning. Always seen in context of resurrection.
- ix. Our challenge is when is it to be fought and when accepted.

## Strategy 1: Give up on this life graciously.

1. We need to recognize God has given us many things to enjoy in this life—we need to be thankful and do not want to begrudge them.

“Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4).

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

2. We must love God the giver more than his gifts in this life.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

- a. C. S. Lewis in the *Screwtape Letters* wrote:

*If, on the other hand, the middle years prove prosperous, our position is even stronger. Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is “finding his place in it,” while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home in earth which is just what we want. You will notice that the young are generally less unwilling to die than the middle-aged and the old.*

3. We need to give up on the things of this life gracefully.

- a. May include such things as career, home, driving, and loved ones

- b. Mother’s story

- c. Career

- i. So much of our identity

- ii. Social life

- iii. Good steward of skills and abilities we have been given

- iv. But there may be other good things to do of more value to the kingdom

- v. Come back to in one of our coming weekends

- d. Home

- i. It may mean much too us, many memories, comfort.

- ii. It may be a lot of work and responsibility.

- iii. Easier on children when alive and especially at our deaths.

- iv. Once not driving can be very isolating.

- v. May be an issue of safety
  - 1. Senior wants independence.
  - 2. Children want safety.

e. Driving

- i. Sign of independence
- ii. Enables living in community
- iii. With cognitive impairment in early stages, problem is not technical abilities but getting lost and forgetting where going.

f. Possessions

- i. Again, makes easier on children
- ii. Many of the younger generations do not want our things.
- iii. Legal rights—especially when cognitively impaired
- iv. Dad's donations

g. Health

- i. Graciously accept the limitations of our aging bodies.  
 “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—” (Ecclesiastes 12:1-5).
- ii. Key is to remember Creator—recognize he knows us and knows what is best for us.
- iii. Friends and loved ones
  - 1. Dorothy at Rolling Hills: Appreciating what we have more than what we have lost.
  - 2. So hard to be resilient

4. We need to forsake some of the values of this life.

a. Self esteem

- i. Our value is best rooted in who we are as made in God's image and redeemed by Christ.
- ii. Less in what we can accomplish

- b. Self-sufficiency or independence
  - i. The ministry of dependence—how we can help others by not being so fiercely independent
  - ii. Giving others the opportunity to serve
  - iii. Dad and toilet paper

## Strategy 2: Embrace Eternity

1. We need to develop a longing for God and his presence.
  - a. We need to experience his love on a deep and satisfying level
 

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you” (Psalm 63:1-3).
  - b. We need to cultivate our love for him in return.
 

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).
2. We need to long for his righteousness.
 

“Your kingdom come, your will be done” (Matt 6:10).

  - a. Increasingly disturbed by sin in ourselves
  - b. Frustrated with sin in the world around us
3. We will become disenchanted with our bodies and long for a resurrected body in Heaven.
  - a. No more pain or disability
  - b. I suspect that we will be able to experience God’s glory in far more profound ways than we are capable of in this body.
4. Scripture does not tell us this for sure, but I believe that when we get to Heaven, we will begin the eternal process of coming to know God better—it will take all of eternity to know an infinite God.

**To the extent that we can understand and experience God’s love for us, develop a longing for God and find ourselves increasingly satisfied with him, more than all other things in this life, we will be prepared to die and to enter his presence. We will find what we have longed for and more. But, if we are grasping on to the things of this earth, we will never be fulfilled.**

### Strategy 3: Fulfill the agenda

1. Determine to die well, and that, as much as possible, your dying glorify God.
  - a. Remember it is not the default.
  - b. Helps if it a conscious decision.
  
2. Life review
  - a. Thinking through life not with ourselves as the main character but seeing it as God's story
  - b. Rejoicing in the good things he has allowed us to do
  - c. Rejoicing in his forgiveness for our sins
  - d. Do it in a form that you can share with your family.
  
3. Strengthen family ties
  - a. One study showed that 39% said that strengthening their families was a priority in their later days.
  - b. Allow your family to serve you.
  - c. When the word family becomes a verb
  - d. One-on-one times
  
4. Saying the four things
  - a. I love you.
  - b. Thank you.
  - c. I forgive you.
  - d. Forgive me.
  - e. Think through who needs to hear these.

BREAK

## Strategy 4: A theology of technology

1. Biblical context
  - a. God: existing throughout eternity as a defined entity—the circle of his holiness
  - b. Creation: it was good, within the circle, consistent with his holy character—life, health, peace, righteousness.
  - c. Fall: man chose to step out of the circle and everything began to unravel—death, disease, war, sin.
  - d. Redemption: Christ came and through his redemption those things that were outside of the circle can be brought back in.
    - i. Sin, righteousness
    - ii. Death, life
    - iii. Sickness, health
  - e. Genesis 1: take dominion, the foundation for all technology
  - f. God typically works through human instruments.
    - i. Moses' staff
    - ii. Feeding the 5000
  - g. Technology by itself is powerless without God's healing touch.
    - i. As Christians we want to combine technology with prayer.
    - ii. James says to anoint with oil and call for prayer.
    - iii. Give thanks for your pills, and ask God to bless them to your body's use.
    - iv. God heals, the physician collects the fee.
    - v. I see no substantial difference between God healing through medicine and directly—it is still God who does it.
2. In considering any intervention
  - a. Generally, be aggressive early in the disease process.
  - b. Define goals of care.
    - i. Cure and get back to normal.
    - ii. Stabilize function.
    - iii. Prepare for a comfortable and dignified death.
    - iv. Continuously reevaluate.
  - c. We must weigh the potential benefit against the potential burden.
  - d. Consider ordinary care that is required vs. extraordinary care that is a product of technology.
    - i. Often boils down to plastic tubes
    - ii. This puts the emphasis on the technology.
  - e. Wiser to think in terms of proportionate vs. disproportionate care.
    - i. Emphasis on the disease context.
    - ii. Ventilator is not good or bad in itself.

- iii. 20-year-old with overwhelming pneumonia, it is proportionate.
- iv. 90-year-old riddled with cancer who gets pneumonia, it is not.
- f. Rarely is there a clear right and wrong for all people.

### 3. Downsides of Technology

#### a. Pascal's diversion

As men are not able to fight against death, misery, ignorance, they have taken it into their heads, in order to be happy, not to think of them at all... We run carelessly to the precipice, after we have put something before us to prevent us seeing it.

- i. Technology can easily become that diversion.
- ii. Prevents us from fulfilling the agenda
- iii. Offers unrealistic hope
- iv. Rare to have closure in ICU when still expecting to beat the odds
- v. Technology can be a god and we must be careful not to trust it but trust in the Lord.
- vi. Technology can be used to resist God's call.
- vii. Pursuing life sustaining treatment to the very end may exchange a comfortable, good death for a medical death that can be a painful fight to the finish.
- viii. It may not be consistent with the gospel that says that death is defeated.

## Strategy 5: Changing gears

1. Default of medicine is to keep pushing on and not giving up.
2. Why do we choose aggressive care? Many reasons:
  - a. Life is good.
  - b. Survival instinct in all of us
  - c. Fear of death—even Christians who may not be afraid of being dead
  - d. Default of medicine
  - e. Pressure from family
  - f. Expecting God to heal
    - i. Hope for life
    - ii. Prepare for death
  - g. Belief that that is surrendering control to God (I would see the opposite)
3. 3 Ways we die—roughly 1/3 each
  - a. Sudden death—no choice



- b. Slow decline—cancer,
    - i. Relapses, go to hospital for another treatment
    - ii. Return to normal life, meanwhile, disease is getting worse and chance of future response is less.
    - iii. Still we continue to expect the kind of good response we have had in the past, and so we press on.
  - c. Recurrent exacerbations—CHF, COPD
    - i. Hospitalizations—get tuned up and home
    - ii. Again things are slowly getting worse and get lulled into thinking that medicine will continue to pull us through.
    - iii. COPD next time on ventilator, you may not get off.
4. Why?
- a. It allows you to complete the agenda—rarely seen in the ICU.
  - b. It is what most people want.
    - i. Gallop poll: if given the choice in last 6 mo of being home with family or in hospital, 95% said home with family, and yet at least 70% die in some institution.
    - ii. Curious exception is people of faith, where more desire aggressive end of life care.
  - c. Strong reasons for believers to change gears
    - i. It honors the Gospel—death is defeated.
    - ii. Heaven is not so bad, we have to fight too hard.
    - iii. It surrenders control to the Lord.
      - 1. The constant tug of war
      - 2. I want to come to the end of life with God in control.
5. When?
- a. Physical
    - i. Need diagnosis
    - ii. Need to know the prognosis with and without treatment
      - 1. Not only length of time but quality of life.
      - 2. Living well at home vs. dependent on machines in a chronic care hospital are clearly two different things.
    - iii. Two questions
      - 1. What abilities or things are so important that you would rather not live without?
      - 2. How much pain and suffering are you willing to go through in order to keep on living?
    - iv. Difficult when dealing with multiple organ failures and specialists who all think that the patient’s organ (heart, kidney etc.) is going to do well but don’t look at the whole picture.

- b. Emotional
  - i. Tired of side effects, being in the hospital, etc.
  - ii. More accepting of death.
- c. Spiritual
  - i. Know that your sins are forgiven.
  - ii. Longing for God, freedom from sin, and a resurrected body
- d. Social—Family willing to let go

6. How

- a. Talk to your family and primary care physician.
- b. Advance directives
  - i. Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care
    - 1. We should all have one, no matter how old.
    - 2. Name advocate for health care decisions who will make decisions if you cannot speak for yourself.
      - a. Ideally someone who can speak for you and knows what your wishes are (substituted judgment).
      - b. Not necessarily spouse-it may be very hard on them.
    - 3. Check the box giving them full authority rather than checking boxes that specify certain treatments-ventilator, IV or nutrition—these should all be context driven.
    - 4. Include a statement of your values—mine is taken from Philippians 1. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:21-25).
    - 5. My own statement:  
I am happy for technology to be used so long as there is reasonable hope of it allowing me to serve others. But, if for physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual reasons it is unlikely I will be able to serve others, I do not want that technology.
  - ii. Living will—takes burden off your power of attorney.
  - iii. Do not resuscitate (DNR, POLST, MOLST)
    - 1. More appropriate in community or nursing home than ICU, especially if dying of reversible cardiac problems.
    - 2. Remember, the burden of resuscitation is great if prolonged hypoxia, and the risk of brain damage increases with age.

- c. Review medications and stop those designed to prolong life (or more, prolong dying).
- d. Hospice—one of the best ways to change gears
  - i. Assures that the end of your life is not a fight to the finish
  - ii. Maximizes comfort care
  - iii. Emphasizes the agenda, be at home with family and have closure
- e. Palliative sedation
- f. Assisted suicide
  - i. Now legal in six states (OR, WA, CA, VT, MT, CO, New Mexico, and DC) and may rapidly spread across the country
  - ii. Very complex, but I would resist on many levels.
  - iii. Typically thought to be mercy killing
  - iv. Oregon survey of those who choose it shows:
    - 1. 95% desire to maintain control
    - 2. 25% for present pain and suffering or anticipated pain and suffering
    - 3. Not really mercy killing
  - v. For me, as a Christian, the biggest issue is surrendering control and trusting God.

### **Strategy 6: When death, comes rest in Jesus.**

1. This is ideal at times—death is nasty and messy, then we do the best we can.
2. Family and loved ones
  - a. Spend quality time.
  - b. Be honest—talk about missing them not offering hope in this life.
  - c. Talk of heaven.
  - d. Sing and play music.
  - e. Read Scripture.
  - f. Give permission to die.
3. For the patient
  - a. Surrender control.
  - b. Trust God to do what is right.
  - c. Rest in him.
 

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

## My Jesus I Love Thee

My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;  
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign.  
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love Thee because Thou has first loved me,  
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.  
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,  
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;  
And say when the death dew lies cold on my brow,  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

In mansions of glory and endless delight,  
I'll ever adore Thee in heaven so bright;  
I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow;  
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

Prayer



