



In conjunction with the September issue of Northern Light Digest, we feature articles on Christians and aging.

Aging gracefully

I'm approaching the age of those people I appreciated so much in the church as I was growing up. I think back to what they gave me in their old age, and realize that's what I can now give to others in my old age. They aged gracefully, and because they did, I know I can age gracefully and have something to offer too.

So I grabbed a notebook to list the things I appreciated most about "the oldies" in my life in the church, and it was so easy to do. All seven points below popped into my mind just like that, clearly showing the impact that those in their old age have had on me - like, for instance, how:

1) They staggered into church no matter what. So when there were days I felt sorry for myself and I didn't feel like going to church, I knew they'd be there if they could be, and I knew I had no excuse. And, of course, after being at services I felt so much better, thanks to those resolute oldies who'd made it there too.

2) They arrived at church in pain, but they left for home cheerful. And I saw that transformation so often that I have no doubt it will happen to me too when I arrive at church in pain in my old age. They showed me in vivid living example the remarkable effect that just being at church has.

3) They were always ready for a bit of fun and teasing. I learnt from my oldies that eyesight may dim in old age, but the twinkle in one's eye doesn't. And that is very good to know.

4) They listened, and I knew they were listening. I would rattle on about something bothering me, and they would nod knowingly, memories would return, and out would come an unforgettable story from their past that would often be exactly what I needed.

5) They were so encouraging. It was during the worst years of my life in the mid-90s when the church was under huge strain with the changes, that a lady in her 80s would always come up to me after my sermons and tell me how wonderfully clear I'd made things for her. A reassuring pat on my arm from her did wonders for me. I learnt from her how powerful encouragement from an oldie can be.

6) They trusted. When their eyesight, hearing and bodily strength weakened, it was amazing to me how content they could still be. When one lady with Parkinson's disease was reduced to being stuck in bed - with splitting headaches and finger pointing to letters on an alphabet chart to communicate - I asked her how she coped. Very slowly she pointed to the letters spelling JESUS. I learnt from her that everything else may fail, but trust remains, and with it contentment.

7) They took the sting out of death. Well into my Dad's 80s he was still pastoring a church and doing several sermons a month. Three days before his death he was still organizing and checking the hymns for that week's service. He knew he was dying but other things were more important.

All these oldies, then, left me with firm memories of what we can still contribute in our old age. I now know for certain, thanks to them, that "Sufficient in old age is God's grace thereof" - that God not only provides his grace in our old age for our own sakes, he also provides us with graceful aging for the sake of others.

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