

As the Glue Sets

Dear Friends,

Growing older is not something we need to fear if we see it as a time that the glue of God's love is setting. This happens as we daily trust Christ who "is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17) and allow the trials and tribulations of daily living drive us into the presence, power and purpose God has for each of us.

I really enjoy meeting people over eighty years of age like Caleb, who instead of getting unglued in the midst of the trials and tribulations, trusted God and let the glue of His love set. Caleb had been in the desert over forty years and before that he had been a slave in Egypt. He could have really become unglued when he learned he had to spend forty years in the wilderness along with the rest of Israelites because they let fear keep them from initially entering the Promised Land. The reason Caleb could have become unglued was because he and Joshua had been the only two spies who had told the Israelites they should go into the Promised Land and trust God for victory. The Israelites didn't believe him and they were judged by God and Caleb had to endure their punishment as well.

As Caleb got older he didn't let this experience or any other make him become unglued where he became bitter. Instead Caleb let the glue of God's love set as he trusted God and as a result became better with each passing year.

Finally Caleb and the rest of the children of Israel had arrived in the promised land. Caleb, because of his faithfulness to the Lord could have had any piece of real estate he desired. Listen to his response when the choice was put before him. ¹⁰ *"Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! ¹¹ I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. ¹² Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but,*

the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said" (Joshua 14:10-12).

Caleb could have easily taken that ground which was easiest to take but he didn't. He wanted the hill country with the giants in it. The glue in his being had set. He had waited forty years to show the Israelites that by trusting God those giants could be driven out and in Joshua 15 we see he did just that. The thing that had scared the people to the extent they had wandered in the wilderness for forty years was the thing that challenged Caleb the most.

As Caleb got older and he encountered one difficulty after another he let the glue of God's love set as he "followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly" (Joshua 14:14). We see this phrase used six times throughout Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua. This was Caleb's secret for growing better rather than bitter as he got older. It enabled him to keep from getting unglued and instead let the glue set in his determinations to trust and serve the Lord.

Many people are scared to death at the thought of growing older. Because we live in a youth oriented culture where people over fifty are often regulated to the fringes of society, many fear old age. By the way, those who think they are getting old when they reach fifty or sixty aren't even aware of Gen. 6:3 where God says a man and woman's "days will be a hundred and twenty years". So don't tell me you are getting old if you are in your fifties. Why, according to that verse you haven't even lived half your life. Look what God did through Moses at eighty and Abraham at ninety. Of course, these guys weren't a couple of couch potatoes spending their days eating Big Macs, watching TV and waiting to go to heaven. They allowed God to reinvent them and give them a new work in spite of their age. Moses at the age of eighty was called from being a shepherd to being a revolutionary leader who would lead the children of Israel from Egypt's bondage. Abraham, over ninety years of age was to become the father of a son from whom the nation of Israel was to come forth.

Henri Nouwen and Walter Gaffney in their book *Aging* wrote, "We believe that aging is not a reason for despair but a basis for hope, not a slow decaying but a gradual maturing, not a fate to be undergone but a chance to be embraced." I agree with them. When I turned fifty rather than feeling depressed over getting older I found myself filled with hope

concerning the new things God was going to do through me. Encountering innocent people who were wrongfully convicted, I started a division in New Life Evangelistic Center called Freedom Now. After training others to take over this work, I then began to seek God as to what I was to do to help the poor and elderly to become energy independent. I felt God leading me to take eight different courses in various areas of renewable energy plus visit those using solar, wind and micro hydropower, making bio-diesel and other forms of renewable energy all over the USA. The end result is three renewable energy-training sites: a twenty-four hour renewable energy television channel, with a 24-hour web-cast site and weekly renewable energy classes. I mention this only to serve as an example of how growing older with vision, purpose and hope burning in my heart has set the glue of God's love and enabled me to feel young and alive.

In Ps 92:13-15 we read, "The virtuous... will flourish in the courts of our God, still bearing fruit in old age, still remaining fresh and green, to proclaim that Yahweh is righteous..." I agree with Aldous Huxley who wrote his brother Julian on his birthday: "It is hard to feel old... we both, I think, belong to that fortunate minority of human beings, who retain the mental openness and elasticity of youth, while being able to enjoy the fruits of an already long experience."

The fact, is the conditions described in Eccl. 12:1-7 have a way of sneaking up on us faster than most of us might like to admit. Could it be that with each passing year we see our physical strength fading, because God is calling each of us into a deeper spiritual relationship with him? As we realize this we begin to understand that the new and exciting things God achieves through us is not a result of our own efforts but for His glory. As those days of trouble arrive, as described in Eccl. 12: 1—7 when our eyes grow dim, we stoop with back pain, the grinders (our teeth) cease, and we are easily awakened all hours of the night, we are reminded that our strength comes from above. We must remember and depend on our Creator for the simplest of activities that in our younger years were easily performed. C. G. Jung in his work, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, writes, "The noon of life is the moment of greatest deployment, when a man is devoted entirely to his work, with all his ability and all his will. But it is also the moment when the twilight is born; the second half of life is beginning ... At midday the descent begins, determining a reversal of all the values and all the ideals of the morning."

Earlier in this study I mentioned the reinvention that occurred in my life as I moved into my fifties. I spoke of the classes I took and new ministries God took me into helping me to feel young and alive. What I did not tell you was the brokenness that occurred. Through a chain of events I was knocked off my high horse of self-sufficiency, arrogance and self-centeredness into the hands of the Living God. This happened as individuals I trusted left me; my sister Shirley, my wife Penny, my father and others close to me died. I was humbled, turned inside out and upside down. Over and over I cried out as the Psalmist did in Psalm 13, "How long, O Lord". In Ps 18:4-6 we read, "The cords of the death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help."

Now having a big ministry or being well-known is not important to me. I know my days are numbered and I want to live each and everyone of them in the light of eternity. I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death and I do not need to fear evil for God is with me. The glue of the assurance of His love is setting. The rod of God's word and the staff of His Spirit comfort me.

With the realization deep in my soul, that God is in control I know that as I grow older, "surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6)

The brokenness, the remolding and the reorientation I have just referred to was possible because of the prayers and love of my sisters and brothers in the New Life Evangelistic Center community. Without their prayerful support, the events God used to set the glue of His love and thus mature me would have very likely made me bitter rather than better. Truly no man or woman is an island. The first thing God declared in the Scripture that was not good is found in Gen 2:18 when He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

For almost two years following Penny's death there was no Eve in my life until Debra entered it. During that time my three children, friends, other relatives, and the members of the Christian community provided the God given support I needed so I would not be swallowed up by loneliness.

Growing old, and letting the glue of trusting God set, can enable us to move into the light of God's love in a deeper more profound way. Like Simeon in Luke 2:25-32 we can embrace Christ and His will for our lives as we fully surrender unto Him. For some who are no longer able to be on the move in a dynamic work for the Lord, it may mean spending hours alone with the Savior in prayer. Jesus told Peter in John 21:18 "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted: but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." If Jesus had spoken that to you would you have been depressed and fearful of the future? If you are clinging to this world the answer is probably, yes. But if you have fully surrendered unto the Lord and His will for your life, and let the glue set, then like Peter you will go forth living every moment of the rest of your life for His glory.

Growing older is not something we fear as the hope of heaven burns within us. Our failing bodies may cause us to loose our grip on this world but the promise of an eternity with our Living Loving Savior provides us with a hope that words cannot define. Paul expressed it this way in 2 Cor. 5:1-10,

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal is swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."

It is a fact, with each passing day we are getting older. Even though this is true we are not obsessed with this fact. We have made it our goal to please God and that is what concerns us. This deep burning desire causes us to reach out in love daily to the lonely, the poor, fatherless, widowed, homeless and incarcerated. It moves us to be earth keepers rather than

earth breakers. We should be a people who are letting the love of Christ flow through us to preserve creation and all of God's gifts.

As we grow older serving Christ in word and deed we will be allowing God's glue of love be set in the depths of our being. After all doesn't Col. 1:17 say that in Christ (God's love personified) all things hold together?. That is what makes growing older so exciting. John expresses this excitement by declaring, "My dear friends, you must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children – which is what we are! We are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are well aware that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He really is" (1 John 3:1-2). As we get older we live each day in the full awareness that we are children of God whose love is stronger than death. Speculations and concerns about our remaining days on earth are useless because living in the awareness of God's love makes each day a celebration of love. What pains there are in growing older are labor pains for God is birthing a new and more full life within us. We are reminded by the pains accompanied with growing older that we are leaving the womb of this world and are being born into the fullness of the new world called heaven. This is an exciting time to be alive. Along with St Paul we declare, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

My friends as you are getting older, don't become obsessed with the birthing pains that are preparing you for your glorified body. Let the glue of determination to follow the Lord set and start to celebrate living in the love of God and all He is doing in you and through you. Truly this is the day that God has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Yours in Christ Service,

Larry Rice