

“THE CROWNS OF OLD AGE”

Jim Cecy is a regular speaker at the European Leadership Forum. He serves as Senior Pastor-Teacher of Campus Bible Church in Fresno, California. Jim is also founder and President of JARON Ministries International, a training ministry for Christian leaders in the U.S. and abroad. He has a Masters of Divinity in Bible Exposition from Talbot Theological Seminary and a Doctorate of Ministry from Western Seminary. He is a conference and seminar speaker for hundreds of churches, schools, seminars, conference centers, Christian groups and denominations in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to other books and materials, he is the author of *The Purity War: A Biblical Guide to Living in an Immoral World* and *Anger: The Worm in My Apple*. Jim has been married for forty-seven years and has thirteen grandchildren. Information about his materials, books and seminars is available at www.jaron.org and www.puritywar.com and www.campusbiblechurch.com

Summary of the Pre-Forum Series:

Most likely, we will face the challenge of caring for the elderly in our home, church and community. Unless the Lord has a different plan for us, we will also reach those supposed “golden years.” In addition to practical senior-care issues, we need to have a biblical understanding as to what God expects of older men and women, especially those who are born-again disciples of Jesus Christ. In this six-part series we will examine the following:

- Session One: The Crowns of Sacred Blessing in Old Age
- Session Two: The Crown of Substantial Rejoicing in Old Age
- Session Three: The Crown of Spiritual Rest in Old Age
- Session Four: The Crown of Spiritual Reproduction in Old Age
- Session Five: The Crown of Serious Reflection in Old Age
- Session Six: The Crown of Supernatural Revival in Old Age

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SESSION ONE: THE CROWNS OF SACRED BLESSING IN OLD AGE

Summary: It has been expressed by modern writers that forty is the old age of youth and fifty is the youth of old age. Where does that leave those who are in their sixties and beyond? This session forms the introduction to the series, examining the challenges of growing older and the many potential blessings as we grow old gracefully. The Book of Proverbs calls them crowns of glory (Proverbs 16:31; 17:6).

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I. Introduction to Session One:

“Forty is the old age of youth. Fifty is the youth of old age.”

II. King Solomon’s Observations About Aging (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 13)

- “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, BEFORE the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”
- “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain”
(Before disappointment sets in and we become grumpy old people)
- “...when the keepers of the house tremble”
(Before our arms and hands start shaking)
- “and the strong men stoop”
(Before our knees and our legs start weakening)
- “when the grinders cease because they are few”
(Before we lose our teeth)
- “and those looking through the windows grow dim”
(Before failing eyesight sets in)
- “when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades”
(Before our hearing fades)
- “when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint”
(Before insomnia controls our sleep patterns)
- “when men are afraid of heights”
(Before we develop a fear of falling because our bones are more easily broken)
- “and (are afraid) of dangers in the streets”
(Before we develop a greater fear of being victimized...a fear of elder abuse)
- “when the almond tree blossoms”
(Before the gray hair sets. In some cases...before the “almond tree” sheds it’s follicles)
- “and the grasshopper drags himself along”
(Before we are reduced to shuffling out of bed, having to work out all the morning aches and pains)
- “and desire no longer is stirred”

(One version reads “the caperberry is ineffective.”)

- “Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets”
(Before we die...and the mourners talk about us) cf. Job 32:6-9 – not all old people are wise.
- “Remember him -- before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”
- “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!” (NASB = “Vanity of vanities...)

III. In the Book of Proverbs the Hebrew word ‘atarah’ speaks of a crown, a wreath of honor (cf. Prov. 4:9b; 12:4)

- Proverbs 17:6a “Grandchildren are the crown of old men...”
- Proverbs 20:29 “The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair.”
- Proverbs 16:31 “A gray head is a crown of glory; it is found in the way of righteousness.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 “Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man.”

Growing old has been divinely appointed as a time to wear the “crowns” of aging.

Discussion Question:

Describe what you expect/expected of old age. How can you best prepare for the next chapter of your life?

Reflect on the following passages and discuss the importance of fearing the Lord (i.e. trusting and obeying His Word) as it relates to growing old.

Proverbs 9:10-11 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.”

Proverbs 10:27 “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.”

Proverbs 22:4-6 “The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards himself will be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

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SESSION TWO: THE CROWN OF SUBSTANTIAL REJOICING IN OLD AGE

Summary: Henry David Thoreau once wrote: “None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm.” Rather than become fearful, sour and stunted in old age, this session challenges us to rejoice in the evidence of God’s faithfulness and goodness throughout the timeline of our lives.

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I. Introduction to Session Two

“It doesn’t pay to get sour as you get old. I pity a man who lives in the past. He lives on stale manna. He gets stunted.” (D.L. Moody)

II. The Old Man’s Psalm (Psalm 71)

- Psalm 71:5-8 “For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth. By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother’s womb; My praise is continually of You. I have become a marvel to many, For You are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with Your praise and with Your glory all day long.”
- Psalm 71:14 “But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more.”
- Psalm 71:22-24a “I will also praise You with a harp, even Your truth, O my God. To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; and my soul, which You have redeemed. My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long...”

Growing old gracefully means seeing each minute as another God-ordained period to rejoice and to share those praises

Discussion Question:

Consider a timeline of your own life. What were the clear evidences of God’s faithfulness and goodness? Name the year and the event.

SESSION THREE: THE CROWN OF SPIRITUAL REST IN OLD AGE

Summary: Although more physical rest might be required, resting spiritually in the Lord is the on-going and necessary cure for the many fears that creep in as we grow older.

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I. Introduction to Session Three

- A. As we age, we have an increased fear:
- a. of loneliness
 - b. of being unproductive
 - c. of rejection, of boredom
 - d. of being dependent on others
 - e. of being unattractive
 - f. of being the victim of a crime

- B. What is God's answer to all these fears?

Psalm 37:7 "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him..."

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Discussion Question:

What are the fears that most affect your spiritual rest in the Lord?

- a fear of loneliness?
- a fear of being unproductive?
- a fear of rejection?
- a fear of boredom?
- a fear of being dependent on others?
- a fear of being unattractive?
- a fear of being the victim of a crime?
- a fear of _____?

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SESSION FOUR: THE CROWN OF SPIRITUAL REPRODUCTION IN OLD AGE

Summary: Obviously, in old age the physical child-bearing years may be over but the spiritual child-bearing years are at their most prolific season. The ancient Greeks considered their old people “a burden to the soil.” God considers godly older men and women fruit trees that can bear quality fruit for generations. This session is especially focused on the elderly’s ministry of teaching and praying for the younger generations.

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I. Introduction to Session Four

II. Regarding our spiritual child-bearing years...

Psalm 92:12-14 “The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree. He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon planted in the house of the LORD. They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green...”

- The ancient Greeks called their old people “a burden to the soil.”
- God calls them fruit trees, created to bear much fruit for Him

e.g. Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Anna, Sarah and Abraham – a new chapter of ministry begins at 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100

We never retire as soldiers of Jesus Christ. We just change battle-fronts.

A. A Ministry of Teaching the Younger Generation

Psalm 71:15-18 “My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and of Your salvation all day long; for I do not know the sum of them. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.”

1. Psalm 71 gives the sermon outline points for our life-message:
 - My Title: My Life Testimony
 - My Subject: The Righteous Character of God.
 - My Evidence: Many Years Relying on His Word
 - My Illustrations: Experiences of God’s Righteous Deeds in My Life.

2. Deuteronomy 4:9 “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.”
3. Psalm 78:5-6 “For (God) established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children...” (cf. Titus 2:1-5)

B. A Ministry of Prayer for the Younger Generation

1. As our energy level for ministry lowers, our passion to pray for the younger generation needs to increase.

Examples:

Opportunities:

Discussion Question:

In what ways are you teaching the next generations?

How intentional are you in praying for the younger generations?

How are you preparing to present your life testimony to your children, the generation to come and to the children yet to be born? (cf. Psalm 78:5-6)

SESSION FIVE: THE CROWN OF SERIOUS REFLECTION IN OLD AGE

Summary: It has been well said: “Instead of worrying about adding years to our lives, we need to be sure we are adding life to our years.” Growing old gracefully is a choice. It requires seeing old age as a season of reflection on the meaning and purpose of our lives. Instead of our lives being empty and futile, they can be full and fertile.

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I. Introduction to Session Five

- A. Old age is to be a season of reflection on the meaning and purpose of our lives.
- B. Instead of worrying about adding years to our lives we need to be sure we are adding life to our years!

II. **Option #1:** We can choose to be like the unsatisfied, empty and miserable old man in Ecclesiastes 6:3-6 thinking it would have been better if he hadn't been born.

III. **Option #2:** We can choose to be like the fulfilled old men in the Bible who died “full of days.”

- Job (Job 42:17)
- Abraham (Gen. 25:8; cf. Gen. 15:15)
- David (Acts 13:36)

Instead of our lives being empty and futile they can be full and fertile.

Jesus came to give us abundant life...even in old age! (John 10:10)

Discussion Questions:

In what ways are you unsatisfied with your life so far? What choices can you make to change those things?

In what ways would those closest to you say you have “fulfilled the purpose of God in your generation” (cf. Acts 13:36)

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SESSION SIX. THE CROWN OF SUPERNATURAL REVIVAL IN OLD AGE

Summary: It is very easy for one generation to criticize and complain about the other. We need express our hope in the next generations as Christ raises up His ambassadors for renewal, revitalization and revival. In other words, we need to bless the next generations in the spirit of Numbers 6:24-26. We also need to see Christian grandparents and older saints as “re-deployed ministers” and missionaries to the generations, while equipping them to refuse to succumb to an inactive retirement culture.

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Introduction to Session Six:

The coming generations are our hope for renewal, revitalization and revival that we did not accomplish in my generation. They deserve our blessing. cf. Numbers 6:22-26 re: “Blessing the Generations”

Blessing #1: “May the LORD bless you.” (Numbers 6:24)

-- “May the LORD show Himself real to you.”

Blessing #2: “May the LORD keep you.” (Numbers 6:24)

-- “May the LORD put a hedge of protection around you.”

Blessing #3. “May the LORD make His face shine on you.” (Numbers 6:25)

-- “May the LORD light your life with the fullness of His glorious character.”

Blessing #4. “May the LORD be gracious to you.” (Numbers 6:25)

-- “May the Lord show His saving power to you.”

Blessing #5. “May the LORD lift up His countenance on you.” (Numbers 6:26)

-- “May the LORD show how pleased He is with you.”

Blessing #6. “May the LORD give you His peace.” (Numbers 6:26)

-- “May the LORD give you His peace and bring you His wholeness.”

There are millions of Christian grandparents worldwide who are called by God to be re-deployed ministers, intentional servants, vision-casters, “never give up” messengers of the Gospel who have given up being a part of the “retirement culture.” They are “big picture” people who create teachable moments and generational memories, influence the thinking of the next generations, are willing to learn to create learning opportunities, who will take another step in “intentionality” and are committed to finishing well in passing the legacy of their faith. (Some of these closing thoughts have been adapted from “Grandparenting Matters” presented by Dr. Larry (www.legacycoalition.com))

Discussion Questions:

What are the names of some of the people in the generations behind you that could really use your blessing, rather than your criticism? Would you be willing to contact them soon?

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