

FLOURISHING IN OLD AGE

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.' " Psalm 92:12-15.

Doesn't this make old age sound appealing? It certainly does to me! What a picture: righteous people, now old, still vital, fresh and green, still bearing fruit for the Kingdom. And what a testimony: "The Lord is the Rock upon which I have built my life; that Rock still holds me firm in my old age. The Lord is honest and true; everything God does is right and good."

Who are the righteous? Within the past year I found a wonderful thought in [The Message](#) by Eugene H. Peterson at the end of Habakkuk 2:4: *"The person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, really alive."* I decided to see what this passage said in my NIV, Inclusive Language Version, and was stunned to find only seven familiar words: *"The righteous will live by their faith."* Such a rich meditation followed that discovery! What could better define the righteous than "the person in right standing before God"? And what is faith but "loyal and steady believing"? What kind of life do these people live? Certainly not just an ordinary existence, but rather the abundant life of which Jesus spoke, the soaring on wings like eagles mentioned by Isaiah, or to go back to Peterson, they are fully alive, *really* alive in a way that makes the emphasis necessary, not excessive.

Moses beautifully illustrates a righteous person flourishing in old age. His call to service for God didn't come until he was eighty. At that time he felt ill-equipped to do what God was asking of him. *"Moses said to the Lord, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' " Exodus 4:10.* After forty years of intensive service, both exhilarating and exasperating, Moses, knowing his life on earth would soon be ending, stood before the whole assembly of Israel and recited the words of a song he had written. It begins like this:

*"Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew,
like showers on new grass,
like abundant rain on tender plants.
I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
upright and just is he."*

Deuteronomy 32:1-4

What an orator Moses had become! At this point in his life he invited all heaven and earth to stand before him, listening as he spoke. Notice how the words Moses used to praise God are so in line with Psalm 92. Moses had no quarrel with God, not even for choosing a leader who was slow of speech and tongue; not even for forbidding that leader from entering the Promised Land. The key to his change? Forty years of loyal and steady believing. Forty years of knowing God face to face, as stated in the beautiful eulogy that God had someone write for Moses:

"Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."

Deuteronomy 34:10-12

Does your heart yearn along with mine as you consider these thoughts? In the margin of my Bible, next to the last two verses of Psalm 92 are these penciled words, dated 3/8/88: "Amen! No need to feel 'old.' I want to be like this." Notice I said there was no need to *feel* old, which is different from *being* old.

Our society puts great emphasis on being and looking young, so much so that it's hard to fight against the trend. I remember the time when my hair was beginning to turn gray, forcing me to make a decision: to dye or not to dye? I decided that letting my hair change color was more in keeping with my personal philosophy that ageing is both normal and desirable. Now, at age 71, I *want* to be considered old in chronological years. Old age has a wisdom, a beauty, a maturity that is delightful. When the old say, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him," you know that many years of loyal and steady believing are behind those sentiments and that they have a message worth hearing. I am happy to join my testimony with theirs: "God is good! Life with God is an adventure! The best is yet to come!" And like Moses, I invite everyone to hear what I have to say – all for the glory of God.

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