

The Game of Life Series – Part 4
Seasoned Seniors

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This morning I am wrapping up our **Game of Life Series**. In this series we looked at some of the major stages and seasons of life that we may find ourselves in. We looked at **marriage, singleness and parenting**.

Today we look at the senior years. For some reason the teaching team thought I would be a good fit for this message. Maybe because I am turning 65 this year.

These days my mailbox is full of AARP advertising and notices to sign up for Medicare. I think I am still in the denial stage, but I did sign up to go with the seniors on their bus trip to DC this week.

I have a new favorite verse: **Proverbs 20:29 (NLT) The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the splendor of the old.**

This message today is for all of us because we can't stop the aging process which means we all will reach those senior years if we stay healthy and Jesus doesn't return first.

My mother is 91 and I have an uncle 93 and one who is 103. People are living longer now than 100 years ago.

Each season of life has its benefits and rewards. The senior years are sometimes described as **the golden years**. Some may disagree and say what is so golden about growing old and having our bodies wear out.

But the Bible describes the senior years in positive terms.

There are many pluses to being a senior and to retirement. This season of life provides many opportunities to serve and grow. **Life has a way of seasoning us with wisdom and knowledge that make seniors a vital resource and blessing.**

Now it is true that as we get older our bodies do begin to show the signs of aging. These bodies were not designed to last forever. God has promised us new and glorious bodies someday.

Philippians 3:20-21 (NLT) But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

This morning I would like to use an **85 year old man in the Bible** as a challenge and encouragement to all of us. **His name is Caleb.** He was one of the 12 spies God sent into the promised land. He and Joshua were the only two that had the faith to overcome the giants. The other 10 spoke unbelief and fear.

As a result of their faith they were the only two that God allowed to live long enough to actually enter the promised land some 40 years later. Here is what God says about Caleb.....

Numbers 14:24 But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. From Caleb's life we learn

1. The choices we make throughout life have an impact on our later years.

Caleb's choices in his 40's had a direct impact on his life in the 80's.

Life experiences either season us with wisdom and make us more humble and gentle and less opinionated or they do the opposite.

Following God wholeheartedly in our younger years helps us to grow old gracefully with God's blessings upon us. That's what we see in Caleb's life.

- It's good to stop and ask: Am I serving God with all my heart – why not

In Joshua chapter 14 we find Caleb still full of life and leading his tribe into new adventures.

READ Joshua 14:6-14 ⁶ Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. ⁷ I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, ⁸ but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. ⁹ So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.’

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 wilderness. 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.” ¹³ Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. ¹⁴ So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

At this time Joshua was dividing up the promised land to the different tribes. And at this point in his life Caleb could have said “**I am 85 years old, it’s time for me to retire, I fought my battles, I paid my dues, so just give me a nice plot of land without any enemies to fight and a nice lake so I can sit back and enjoy these last years.**

But instead he said “**Give me the hill country with enemy strongholds. With God’s help I will conquer them.**” He was still full of faith, he still had vision to do things with his life, he wanted his last years to count for something.

Caleb reminds me of what the Psalmist says in **Psalm 92:14 ESV (The righteous) still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,**

I like that. **Caleb was still full of sap.** I want to be well seasoned and still full of sap in my senior years. **Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old,** when they spoke to Pharaoh. They were full of sap.

Reminds me of 94-year-old Frank Walsh. After his wife died, he inquired about joining the local high school marching band. They accepted him and taught him how to play the cymbals as he marched with them.

We are in the midst of a huge wave of people moving into retirement age. Baby Boomers are retiring leaving a huge hole in the workforce. **You are considered a Baby Boomer if you were born between 1946 – 1964.** If you are a baby boomer you probably remember where you were when President Kennedy was assassinated and when Neil Armstrong took his first step on the moon.

This coming wave of retirees can prove to be a huge blessing to the church in the days ahead. For most people when they retire, they have **extra time to serve, more discretionary funds, and many life skills to bless.** God wants us to see our seniors as a treasure among us.

2. God wants us to honor the elderly and find ways to use their seasoned gifts and abilities.

Our culture often treats seniors as disposable and sometimes irrelevant. We focus a lot on the youth culture but God also wants to use the wisdom of the grandfathers and grandmothers to help the younger generation be strong and faithful. God is building with an intergenerational vision today.

Leviticus 19:32 NIV Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

We want to nurture a **culture of honor** here at Petra toward our seniors.

Our church needs to continue to find ways to use the gifts, abilities and wisdom of the senior population. **We want to empower older adults to continue serving!!**

We want to create intergenerational environments. As retirees, they want to use their new freedom to serve some grand purpose.

Most seniors have much wisdom because they have been seasoned by the challenges of life, from pain and failure, from success and joys, from hands on experience and many desperate prayers. Life has taught them things you cannot learn from school but only from personally experiencing the harsh realities of life.

Job 12:12 NLT Wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to the old.

The knowledge and wisdom seniors have gained over the years is like a secret treasure to those needing advice.

Story: A group of retired friends who meet every Saturday morning at a Salt Lake City deli were growing tired of the same conversation each week. They wanted to share their wisdom beyond their friend group of seven. As a lark, they set up a card table at the nearby Salt Lake City's farmers market and told people they were dispensing free advice. They even made a large banner: **“Old Coots Giving Advice—It’s Probably Bad Advice, But It’s Free.”**

To their surprise, people started showing up and sharing their problems. A lot of them. Questions like how to keep romance alive. "I always tell people that the first thing you do is put down your phone and start talking," retiree Richard Klein said.

Each Saturday the “Old Coots” have taken on the issues of about 30 to 40 people who come by seeking their advice. “It’s a way for a person to get an outside opinion from somebody who has nothing to gain,” said member Tony Caputo. “Somebody told us the other day that we're the most popular attraction at the market.”

“To be truthful, I’m not sure that any of us can claim to have much wisdom,” said 69-year-old John Lesnan “but it sure has been a lot of fun. Maybe all of us coots really do have more to offer than we thought.”

Seniors do have buckets full of wisdom. **Over the years I have always tried to have older people in my life who I could talk to.** One of my most precious mentors, **Johnny Stoltzfus**, has recently died. I have learned a lot from him.

My wife shared this verse with me the other day. It gives purpose to our senior years. **Psalm 71:18 NLT Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me.**

Malachi the prophet said a characteristic of the last days will be a new appreciation and connecting of the hearts of the young and old. I see that happening here at Petra. **Older men** mentoring the younger men. **Older women** speaking life and encouragement into the younger women.

3. God wants seniors to use their extra time, gifts, and resources to make a kingdom difference.

You may not think so, but God has a role for you as a senior Christian. The question is, when you hit retirement years, and you can't put in as many hours a day as you used to, and maybe your body can't handle strenuous things, what does God want you to do?

Becoming a senior brings many changes with it. Transition and realignment of roles, no longer being in charge of things the way you were before. Status, authority and responsibilities change.

It also brings new health issues, loss of friends and spouses as a very real part of this season of life. But God's grace is there in a special way for these senior years.

Retirement is looking different today for many baby boomers than the retirees of the past. Many baby boomer retirees want to stay active, involved, making a difference in some way. Some continue working part time jobs, start another business, or volunteering. They like doing things like going on mission trips with some of the younger people or doing ministry with them in some way.

Travel and volunteering are at the top of the list of priorities for many seniors. Giving of themselves to something of **value and purpose** is important to them. They are looking for meaningful things they can do that use their skills.

Our Seniors are a blessing to us at Petra. Examples: I see seniors – helping manage the community gardens and giving gardening advice, serving in the food bank, picking up people in the van Sunday mornings, serving us as ushers and greeters, helping work with the children in Release Time and Children’s Church, helping with financial counseling, marriage counseling, and other counseling, visiting people who are in need or lonely, helping with funeral meals, business coaching, supporting missionaries and going on mission trips, helping with church plants, and others are serving on boards and volunteering in the community. Forgive me if I missed some of you because you serve in so many ways.

Seniors you are a blessing. We value you as a treasured part of our church family. We are blessed by your wisdom and many skills and abilities. We are blessed by your presence as seasoned brothers and sisters who add much to who Petra is.

Many of you have helped build this church to what it is today. It is part of your legacy that will live on for generations to come and most importantly will be recognized and rewarded by God for your faithful service someday.

4. Let’s keep our seniors who are not able to participate in our church life surrounded with our love, prayers and support.

Some of our seniors are in nursing homes and not able to do much. Some of them are our faithful prayer intercessors. Some watch every Sunday online. We count each one a blessing as their body and mind fade. They are our cherished family.

I know some moms and kids visit the elderly in retirement homes. **A visit is a really huge things for these folks.**

My mother watches online pretty faithfully. I close with a paper I found on my mother’s dresser several months ago. The author is unknown. So, to my mother and all our more elderly seniors...

PRAYER OF THE GOLDEN YEARS – author unknown

**Blessed are they who understand
My faltering step and palsied hand.**

**Blessed are they who know my ears, today,
Must strain to catch the things they say.**

**Blessed are they who seem to know
That my eyes are dim and my wits are slow.**

**Blessed are they, with a cherry smile,
Who stop to chat for a little while.**

**Blessed are they who never say,
“You told that story twice today.”**

**Blessed are they who know the ways
To bring back memories of yesterdays.**

**Blessed are they who make it known
That I’m loved, respected, and not alone.**

**Blessed are they who ease the days
On my journey Home, in loving ways.**

Isaiah 46:4 NLT I will be your God throughout your lifetime— until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.