

4 Cultural Lies About Aging

Introduction. Every person at every stage of life is made in the image of God, and we value all of human life, from beginning to end. But we inhabit a world that's dead set on living in a false story of aging — one that values, at most, only the first half of life but doesn't value its second half of bodily decline.

While we assert that all of life is valuable in all of its stages, do we live by this conviction? One of the simplest ways for the church to live against the grain is to embrace, defend, and live as though we value all of life, including the latter parts. But prevailing attitudes toward decline and death yield negative consequences for all who embrace them. For this reason, I want to show you four lies our culture wants us to believe about aging, and the truth the Bible gives in response. I pray this will encourage and motivate all of us to better heights in your life.

I. The Elderly Are Obsolete

- A. As abilities decline and roles shift, aging changes us from someone who “is and does” to someone who “was and did.” We used to be employees, supervisors, fit, lean, beautiful, active, parents, spouses, and siblings. We feel like we’ve become has-beens, marking time until our bodies give out on us.
 - 1. The elderly may still be physically present, but their ability to contribute to or live in a rapidly-changing world is going away.
 - 2. Like pagers and floppy disks, their day of relevance has passed into sunset. Let them collect in communities with other citizens of yesterday.
- B. But the Bible instructs us that the elderly are invaluable. Their insights and experience make them worthy of honor (Leviticus 19:32). Their perspectives matter for the well-being of the family, whether physical family or family of God. That wisdom and experience should grant them a central place in our lives, rather than a sequestered one (Titus 2:2-3). A great illustration of this point is what older people accomplished in the New Testament:
 - 1. Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-25).
 - 2. Simeon (Luke 2:25-35).
 - 3. Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38).
- C. According to the Bible, aging is a completion, which deepens their identity. Older men and women are presented as the repositories of a “generational (spiritual) wealth” that can only be built by the passage of time and the application of the Word. Though the kinds of contributions they make may change over time, “They still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (Psalm 92:14).

II. Wisdom Is Found Among the Young

- A. Because tech changes so rapidly, the old among us struggle to keep up. Knowledge moves faster than they do. Younger generations can unfairly link a lack of current knowledge with a lack of wisdom. How can someone who needs help with her printer have wisdom to lend?

1. Nowhere is this more evident than on social media platforms, where an entire class of “experts” has emerged: influencers with virtually no credentials are dispensing the wisdom by which we’re to arrange our lives.
 2. These influencers aren’t gray-hairs. Most are still young adults. And very few are marketing the wisdom of age; they’re more likely linking us to the newest fountain of youth with an affiliate link.
- B. The Bible instructs us that “wisdom is found among the aged” ([Job 12:12](#)).
1. That elderly couple who sits behind you at worship assemblies may not know how to change their router password, but they likely know some invaluable lessons about marriage ([Ephesians 5:29](#); [1 Peter 3:7](#)) and parenting ([Proverbs 23:13-14](#); [29:17](#)).
 2. Your grandma who never used sunscreen or had a chemical peel likely knows some secrets about inner beauty ([1 Peter 3:3-6](#)).

III. The Elderly Are a Burden

- A. In our age of radical individualism, most of us conceive of a successful life as one where we grow up to become self-sufficient, leaving dependency permanently behind in childhood. To return to a state of dependency feels like the ultimate failure. Thus, the idea of the elderly as burdensome takes root.
- B. The Bible instructs us that care for the elderly is a sacred charge ([Exodus 20:12](#); [21:17](#); [Proverbs 23:22](#); cp. [Matthew 15:3-4](#); [1 Timothy 5:3-4](#), 8). There’s a few great examples of people caring for their relatives in the Bible:
1. Joseph took care of his father Jacob and family ([Genesis 45:9-11](#); [47:11-12](#)).
 2. Ruth took care of her mother-in-law ([Ruth 1:16-17](#); [2:2](#), [17-18](#), [23](#)).
 3. Jesus took care of His mother Mary ([John 19:26-27](#)).
- C. Long life will entail dependency on younger generations. But rather than conceive of caregiving as a downward-only duty, we instead expect that caregiving upward will be a normal, anticipated part of the rhythm of life — done out of gratitude. For those younger who are charged with this duty, the act changes us for the better.

IV. Age Is Just a Number

- A. You’re only as old as you feel! Pay no attention to a date on a calendar! You don’t look a day over 39! So say the birthday cards and the best friends.
- B. The Bible tells us to number our days properly ([Psalm 90:12](#)). For the believer, aging gracefully is rooted in a distinctly godly understanding of grace: that the time God gives us is precious and that our awareness of its passing develops wisdom in us. Well-intended platitudes like “Age is just a number” contain a kernel of truth, but they also betray our desire to deny or minimize the passage of time. Age isn’t just a number. It’s an indicator light on the dashboard of life. If we want to steward the time God has given, we need to pay attention to how much we likely have left to steward.
1. Our culture tells us that aging is a process to be prevented, concealed, and denied through all manner of injections, surgeries, laser treatments, diets, workouts, and supplements.

2. When we read that “gray hair is a crown of glory,” we’re tempted to laugh (Proverbs 16:31; 20:29). Those who gain it receive a form of riches: more time for intergenerational relationships, and more time for faithful service to God and others. Old age does erode our health, increasing doctor appointments, medications, and care. But even in receiving that care, we’re met with God’s sustaining presence (Psalm 71:9, 17-18; cp. Isaiah 46:4). It’s so encouraging to see faithful couples and individuals who God cared for:
- a) Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 25:8).
 - b) Moses (Deuteronomy 34:7).
 - c) Caleb (Joshua 14:10-12).
 - d) Eli (1 Samuel 4:15-18).
 - e) Samuel (1 Samuel 8:1-5).
 - f) Joshua (Joshua 24:1-28).
 - g) Barzillai (2 Samuel 19:31-39).

Conclusion. The world’s false story of anti-aging is motivated by fear: Don’t get old. You’ll be invisible, irrelevant, a has-been, a burden. However, the Bible’s true story of aging is motivated by joy, so you need to embrace aging.

No one’s a has-been in God’s family. Which story will you embrace? Your quality of life, your willingness to care for the aging, and your witness to those around you depend on your answer. Aging is the ultimate test of steadfastness. No story but the true one will see us through with dignity and grace.

I am deeply indebted to Jen Wilkin for the use of her material.