

# Stages of Life

## Youth

Youth is a thrilling stage of life. Young people are learning to know what it's like to be more independent and learning the responsibilities and consequences of that independence. Youth can also be one of the more awkward and lonesome times of life because of trying to fit in to a social group while maintaining a meaningful Christian life. How can we strengthen the resolve of youth against the temptations they face? Do we sometimes leave them on their own too much as we try to give them room to be more independent? Is it sometimes a temptation for older Christians to try to teach young people life's lessons by consistently pointing out the things they are doing wrong and perhaps neglecting to instruct them on the proper way? How can we bolster the youth in a positive way?

The church youth program is a way to prepare the youth for Christian life and to encourage the growth of their talents. How structured should youth programs be? What can be done to promote healthy social skills such as proper conversational skills, having good manners, etc.? How can the church help nurture appropriate self-confidence? Should every young person be pushed to serve in a unit, mission, or care facility?

## Newly Married

Young people are excited when they begin their home. Are our expectations for how marriage works often too high or unrealistic? What are the dangers of going into marriage expecting to always live the good life? Some may think that if they are unhappy before they are married, marriage will make them happy. Do older Christians sometimes worsen this misconception through teasing and matchmaking? What can go wrong if someone enters marriage believing that their spouse will make them happy even though they struggled to find happiness as a youth? Marriage may bring great happiness or great unhappiness. What factors determine what happens over time?

A marriage is made up of two people who come from different backgrounds. What prepares them to form a new home of their own? What is necessary for them to respect each other's concepts, traditions, and values? What is the proper balance in the husband and wife's relationship—he being the head of the home and she being in a submissive, supporting role, yet carrying the heavier load in caring for the children? Taking care of the home and young children is a big job that can be taken for granted by some men. Is the man's role solely as a provider and advisor, or should he take more of an active role in household tasks? Alternatively, is it appropriate for a wife to get a part-time job to help with finances while there are young children at home?

What foundational blocks need to be laid between husband and wife before children are added to the home? With children comes the need to rear them with love and a vision for the future. If there is not a clear conviction or plan, dealing with children can quickly get out of hand and become a battle for control. This situation leads to frustration on the part of both the parent and the child. How does a young couple find a solid, spiritual vision on child nurture? Is it more important to correct a child or to teach them?

## Middle Age

We tend to get locked into our patterns of life: immersed in our occupation, introverted or extroverted, and socially accomplished or more withdrawn. Is middle age a time of less spiritual growth, less spiritual emphasis? Middle age is often the time we get into business and financial involvements that absorb much of our time. How can we assess and correct intemperate work habits that cause us to neglect our duties in our home or congregation? What is the proper balance between time spent away from home and time spent with our family?

Not many couples volunteer for mission service in middle age; it often is younger families who go to the mission, and it is often older couples who go to serve as houseparents in voluntary service units. In what form should we seek to give service in middle age? The church is greatly enriched by the gifts and labors of this age group. The refining fire of time has usually tempered them, giving them a certain balance of youth and wisdom that can be very useful. This leaves us with an important responsibility to teach and nurture. How do we fulfill this responsibility? What is the proper role or relationship of the middle aged in dealing with the younger in the workings of the church? It seems it is difficult for some to accept that they are no longer young, clinging to the last vestiges of youth in a way that onlookers may find concerning or amusing.

It is important for families to spend time together. However, it can be possible to spend so much time with family that we have little time or desire for other fellowship. How do we know if we have become too immersed in our own family: our married children and young families and grandchildren?

## Over Seventy, and the Sunset Years

Worldwide, only forty-three percent of people make it to the age of seventy. So, a person is very privileged to join this age group. Studies have shown that the majority of people at this age find themselves the most contented. For those in their seventies and even eighties, it can be a time of great responsibility. Some may be busier at this age (especially with the work of the church), than they were when they were younger. What groundwork is necessary in order for a person to be contented and happy when they reach older age? What are things that give older Christians an advantage when reaching out to others?

Aging also brings an undeniable physical decline that is, in varying degrees, an added burden, which can affect a positive outlook. How can we graciously accept physical limitations? What positive attributes do we gain in the place of our physical strength and stamina? What are some ways to combat possible feelings of loneliness or inferiority that may manifest themselves? In congregational elections, the younger men tend to get nominated and get elected for the various positions. Is it normal for the older to have feelings that it is all over, they are putting us out to pasture, or that we are not relevant any longer?

One of the greatest joys of aging is being grandparents and watching grandchildren mature. What responsibilities do grandparents have to their children and grandchildren? Or is being a grandparent simply the role of an observer?

Some very talented and useful people never marry or have lost a spouse to death.

Aging brings a few added challenges for them that may not be completely understood by those who are not in the same shoes. How can these brothers and sisters continue to find fulfillment?

What are the avenues for service as we age? Older people have learned many lessons in life. Their wisdom is essential for the nurture and growth of younger Christians. The experiences they have in life are meant to be shared for the edification of others. How can we maintain the desire to fulfill our duty to our brethren and the church as we enter a stage of life where energy or zeal may be waning?

Can the older ones find fulfillment in being in a supportive role as the younger and middle aged take on the responsibility for the church at large, leadership, etc.? Do the ones in this age recognize the need to be gracious when we need to be supporters of the younger brothers and sisters, but also to be gracious when asked to help with something?

#### Scriptures for Meditation

1 Timothy 4:12

Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:1

2 Timothy 2:22

1 John 2:12-14

Titus 2:3-5

Titus 2:2, 7-12

Matthew 11:28-30