Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!

Introduction

Welcome to the second section of the course we're calling "Flourishing in the Third Third of Life."

Last time, in Section 1, I clarified the meaning of key terms, such as "flourishing" and "third third." I presented three negative narratives that might keep us from flourishing, but concluded with the stirring promise of Psalm 92. "*The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap*" (92:12-14).

This psalm has great news for those of us in or entering the third third of life. We can indeed flourish like beautiful and productive trees. We can produce fruit even in old age. As we receive this news with gratitude, we may wonder: *How? How does flourishing happen as we get older? How can I continue to bear fruit in the third third of life?*

We will be working on the "How?" question today and in the following sections of this course. I'll be talking about what we might do to realize God's promise of flourishing in the third third of life. Today, we'll begin by returning to Psalm 92 for answers to the "How?" question.

How Can We Flourish in the Third Third of Life?

How can we flourish in the third third of life?

Psalm 92 explains how the righteous flourish like palm and cedar trees. Here's what it says: "*They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God*" (92:13). We will flourish when we are "planted in the house of the LORD." This means the roots of our lives must grow down into the soil of God's presence. Living fully and fruitfully is the product of a growing and deep relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

When we, as Christians, see references to “the house of the LORD” and “the courts of our God,” we don’t take them literally as speaking of the ancient temple in Jerusalem. Rather, we understand these references in a new way because of what God has done in Christ. For example, in Ephesians 2:19-22 we read,

> *So then you [Gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

Did you catch that? In Christ, the temple is no longer a building in Jerusalem. Rather, we who belong to Christ have been “joined together” and are growing “into a holy temple in the Lord” (2:21). We are “built together spiritually into a dwelling place of God” (2:22). We are the temple of God! God lives in and among us!

Since Christians in community are the house of the Lord and the courts of our God, our flourishing depends on our engagement with our fellow Christians. We will flourish if we are planted in the “temple” of Christian community. This means that our relationships in the body of Christ will have everything to do with our flourishing in life. *If you want to live fully and fruitfully in the third third of life, then nurture deep, loving, lasting, and generative relationships.*

In a few minutes we’ll look in greater depth at biblical teaching on relationships and flourishing, but first I’d like to summarize some scientific studies that will help you see the value of relationships for third third flourishing from a different perspective.

Relationships and the Harvard Study of Adult Development

First, let’s look at relationships and the Harvard Study of Adult Development. The focus of this study is human health and wellbeing. Rather than studying abnormal psychology – as was common when the

study began in 1938 – the Harvard Study, called the Grant Study back when it started, sought to discover what was normal, healthy, and positive in human development and experience.

Initially, the Grant Study focused on 268 recruits from the Harvard classes of 1939 through 1944. One of those recruits was a young man named, John F. Kennedy, who was a member of the Harvard class of 1940. The recruits underwent extremely thorough medical and psychological examinations, including in-depth interviews of the participants and their families. This level of scrutiny continued throughout the lifetimes of the study participants. By 2017, 19 of the original 268 were still alive, all well into their nineties.

Among other things, the Harvard study sought to address our basic question: *How can we flourish in the third third of life?* Though it produced mountains of academic research, as you might imagine, the study's directors have summarized the study's findings for us in very accessible ways. Perhaps the most available is a TED talk by current director Dr. Robert Waldinger. *What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness* was given in 2015. Since then it has been watched over 41,000,000 times!

Here's how Waldinger summarizes the findings of the Adult Development study:

> So what have we learned? What are the lessons that come from the tens of thousands of pages of information that we've generated on these lives? Well, the lessons aren't about wealth or fame or working harder and harder. The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: *Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period*.

Let's hear that one more time. After decades of study and tens of thousands of pages of research data, the bottom line is this. "Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period." Wow!

Waldinger adds another surprising result of the Harvard study:

> Once we had followed our men all the way into their 80s, we wanted to look back at them at midlife and to see if we could predict who was going to grow into a happy, healthy octogenarian and who wasn't. And when we gathered together everything we knew about them at age 50, it wasn't their middle age cholesterol levels that predicted how they were going to grow old. It was *how satisfied they were in their relationships. The people who were the most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80*.

In his commendation of relationships, Waldinger concurs with George Vaillant, a previous director of the Harvard Study. In his book *Triumphs of Experience*, Vaillant writes, "[I]t was the *capacity for intimate relationships* that predicted *flourishing* in all aspects of these men's lives" (p. 40). Later, Vaillant said, "When the study began, nobody cared about empathy or attachment. But the key to healthy aging is *relationships, relationships, relationships*."

So, from the Harvard Study of Adult Development we learn that relationships are crucial for third third flourishing. I'd like you to hold this high estimation of relationships in your mind as we examine a different perspective on how relationships contribute to living fully and fruitfully in the third third of life.

Relationships and Brain Science

I'd like to turn our attention to relationships and brain science. The findings of the Harvard Study on the importance of relationships are confirmed by current research on the brain as summarized in John Medina's fascinating book, *Brain Rules for Aging Well: Ten Principles for Staying Vital, Happy, and Sharp*. Medina, a molecular biologist and brain scientist in the Pacific Northwest, explains:

> Social interactions are like vitamins and minerals for aging brains, with ridiculously powerful implications. Even socializing over the Internet provides benefits. The studies are anchored in the safe harbor of peer-reviewed research. The first set of studies established a solid correlation between social interactions and cognition. Researcher Bryan James, an epidemiologist with the Rush

> Alzheimer's Disease Center, assessed the typical cognitive function and social interactivity of 1,140 seniors without dementia. He scored their social interactivity, then measured their rate of global cognitive decline over a twelve-year period. *For the group that socialized the most, the rate of cognitive decline was 70 percent less than for those who socialized the least* (pp. 16-17).

The idea that relationships help protect our brains as we age is confirmed by other research as well, according to Medina. He writes:

> The answer to the question "Does socialization really decrease the rate of cognitive decline?" is a robust and hearty "Yes." How exactly does the buoyant power of socialization work? Two main ways: *it reduces stress*, which helps maintain not only the body's general health but specific aspects of the immune system, and *it's a workout for the brain* (p. 18).

Yes, socializing effectively exercises the brain. As Medina observes, "One of the reasons why social interactions are so good for you is that *they take so much energy to maintain*, consistently giving your brain a bona fide workout" (p. 19). Thus, "The more social relationships you maintain, the bigger the gray matter volume in specific regions of your frontal lobe. Which means that *relationships are to the frontal lobe what milk shakes are to your waistline*" (p. 21).

But it's not just the quantity of relationships that matters here. "Studies show," Medina writes, "that it's not the overall number of interactions that benefit health, but the *net quality* of the individual interactions" (p. 23). In fact, relationships with diverse people and diverse ages offer an extra benefit. Therefore,

> *It's best to have friends of all ages—including kids*. That notion may transcend our culture's perspective, but not our culture's data. *The more intergenerational relationships older people form, the higher the brain benefit turns out to be, especially when seniors interact with elementary-age children*. It reduces stress, decreases rates of affective disorders such as anxiety and depression, and even lowers mortality rates (p. 24).

So, from developmental psychology and neuroscience we get the same conclusion: *If you want to flourish in the third third of life, focus on having good relationships*. In fact, relationships matter more than just about anything else.

Relationships in Scripture

Now let's look at relationships in Scripture.

The importance of relationships for flourishing comes as no surprise to those of us who know the Bible. Scripture emphasizes the importance of relationships from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. In Genesis 1:27-28, for example, human beings are created in God's image as male and female. God made us as beings in relationship, mirroring God's own relational nature. Notice that the command to be fruitful is given, not to a solitary man or a solitary woman, but to the man and woman in relationship together. Fruitfulness and relationships go hand in hand.

In the final chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22:2, we read:

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and *the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations*.

The future promises not just individual salvation, but "the healing of the nations." In the age to come, all kinds of relationships among people will be healed.

Healing of this sort is necessary because of human sin. In Genesis 3, the man and woman chose to disobey God. When they did, the central relationships of life were disrupted and distorted. Human beings hid from God rather than enjoying his presence. Conflict replaced partnership between the man and the woman. Even the human relationship with nature was broken by sin. Thus, the relational wholeness God had

intended for creation was lost, and we live today in that lostness, in a world filled with fragmented and broken relationships.

But God's ultimate will for humanity is not lost. God's amazing grace is greater than all our sin. So, way back in Genesis, God began to implement God's own plan to redeem and restore all things, including our broken relationships. We see God working out this plan in a powerful way in the New Testament letter called Ephesians.

Relationships in Ephesians

According to Ephesians 2, God's grace in Jesus Christ brings us into relationship with God as we are united with him in love. Plus, when we receive God's grace through faith, we are created anew in Christ Jesus. God has a whole new way of living for us, a life of good works. We are not saved by our good works, but for good works. Salvation by grace leads to a life of fruitfulness in Christ.

But individual fruitfulness is not all that comes from God's grace. The second half of Ephesians 2 reveals that the death of Christ on the cross not only saves individuals from sin and death, but also brings peace between divided peoples (2:14-16). Through the cross of Christ, God reconciles people who once were enemies. **God** redeems and restores broken relationships. Ephesians focuses, in particular, on the broken relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Thus, to the Gentile audience of the letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes what I read earlier in this talk. Let me read this passage once again:

> So then you [meaning, you Gentiles who have accepted God's grace in Christ, you] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him *the whole structure is joined together* and *grows into a holy temple* in the Lord; in whom *you also are built together spiritually* into a dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

God joins together all of God's people in unity. Broken relationships are mended. Injustice is overcome. Reconciliation is secured through the saving death of Christ. Together, we become a temple, a dwelling place for God.[1]

Given what Scripture reveals about human relationships, how they are essential to our living fully and fruitfully, it comes as no surprise that developmental psychology and brain science concur with what God has revealed in the Bible. You could rightly say that Scripture teaches us that the secret to flourishing is "Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!" Flourishing begins with our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and touches all other relationships. It encompasses, enriches, and depends on our relationships with others. As we experience reconciliation through Christ, as we live in community as the body of Christ, we will produce what Ephesians 5:9 calls "the fruit of light," namely, "all that is good and right and true." What an astounding promise!

Three Types of Vital Relationships

God's grace in Jesus Christ transforms our relationships, and this enhances our flourishing in life. But certain kinds of relationships are particularly important for flourishing in the third third of life. As I wrap up this teaching time, I'd like to focus on three types of relationships that are especially vital for older adults:

1. Close, committed, loving relationships.
2. Intergenerational relationships.
3. Mentoring relationships.

1. Close, Committed, Loving Relationships

First of all, if you want to flourish in your third third, nurture close, committed, loving relationships, such as those we have in our families or with dear friends. After showing us in chapters 4 and 5 how to live well and honor God in all of our relationships, Ephesians spends quite a bit of time focusing on the relationships within households (5:21-6:9). As people redeemed and reconciled through Christ, we are to live out who we are now in our core relationships.

As you might guess, academic research affirms the importance of our key relationships for flourishing. According to George Vaillant, former director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, “A good marriage at age 50 predicted positive aging at 80” (*Aging Well*, p. 13).[2] John Medina in *Brain Rules for Aging Well* agrees about the value of marriage, “Stress-reducing, high-quality relationships, such as a good marriage, are particularly helpful for longevity” (p. 37).

Notice, though, that Medina does not limit longevity-increasing relationships to marriage. Other “stress-reducing, high-quality relationships” are also implicitly important. This implication is supported by compelling recent research on the value of friendship for third third thriving.[3] One study found that “valuing friendships was related to better functioning, *particularly among older adults*.” The study’s director, Dr. William Chopik, explains:

> Friendships become even more important as we age . . . . Keeping a few really good friends around can make a world of difference for our health and well-being. . . . There are now a few studies starting to show just how important friendships can be for older adults. Summaries of these studies show that friendships predict day-to-day happiness more and ultimately how long we’ll live. . . .

So, if you are married, by all means seek to nurture a healthy, happy marriage. But don’t limit yourself to a close relationship only with your spouse. Build close friendships as well. And if you are not married, perhaps because your spouse died or for any other reason, you are not out of options. Friendships can make a huge difference in your wellbeing.

Before I move on from talking about close, committed, loving relationships, I want to add one more bit of learning from the Harvard Study of Adult Development. In his book *Aging Well*, George Vaillant writes, “In all of our samples the mastery of the Eriksonian task of Generativity was the best predictor of an enduring and happy marriage in old age” (p. 113). Erik Erikson defined generativity as “a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (*Childhood and Society*, p. 267). Vaillant’s surprising point is that what contributes to “an enduring

and happy marriage in old age" is a couple's shared vision of life beyond themselves. It's their common desire to make a difference for the next generations. Do you want to have a strong and healthy marriage in the third third of life? Then team up with your spouse to influence things that will outlive you and your marriage. Let your marriage be for the good of others, not just yourselves.[4]

2. Intergenerational Relationships

In addition to close, committed, loving relationships, intergenerational relationships will help us flourish in the third third of life.

You'll remember that John Medina underscored the value of connection with younger people, especially children. He writes, "The more intergenerational relationships older people form, the higher the brain benefit turns out to be" (*Brain Rules for Aging Well*, p. 24). So, you might be motivated to develop relationships with younger folk because of how these relationships will benefit you. You invite the grandchildren over because you know that being with them will be good for your brain and body!

But I'm quite sure you are inspired by something more than self-interest as you relate to younger people. In the third third of life, we have within us a desire to influence younger folk, not for our good, but for theirs. What Erikson called generativity lives within our hearts, energizing our imaginations and motivating our actions. We don't need to focus on the benefits for ourselves of intergenerational relationships because we want to make a difference in the lives of younger people and in the world of the future.

You find generativity in Scripture, by the way. Take Psalm 71:17-18, for example:

> O God, from my youth you have taught me,
> and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
> So even to old age and gray hairs,
> O God, do not forsake me,

until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.

The psalm writer yearns to take what he learned of God in his life and pass it on “to all the generations to come.” That’s generativity in spades!

Of course, for many of us in the third third of life, grandparenting is a primary context for intergenerational relationships. Though I’m not yet a grandparent, I see how much joy and blessing come through the relationships that grandparents have with their grandchildren.

I do know the joy and blessing of this kind of the grandparenting relationship from the grandchild side of things. My grandfather on my mother’s side, whom I called Poppy, was my best friend as I grew up. He lived just down the street from me, so I spent thousands of hours with him when I was a boy. Poppy and I had all sorts of adventures, but mostly we hung out in his workshop. When I was young, I watched him build and fix all sorts of things with his magnificent collection of tools. As I got older, Poppy taught me how to use those tools. I’ll never forget the first time he let me use his table saw to build a dog house. Today, I have many of Poppy’s tools in my own shop at home. Every single time I use his table saw, I think of him with gratitude. And, though he’s been with the Lord for 29 years now, I still miss him.

I could go on and on talking about how much of a difference Poppy made in my life. I knew that even when I young. But, until recently, it never dawned me that I was making a difference in his life as well, giving him a way to express his generativity, helping his brain to be nimble and strong. What a wonderful mutuality in that kind of intergenerational relationship![5]

If you have grandchildren, think about how you might nurture your relationship with them. I have a good friend who was the CEO of a major company. When she retired, she realized that she had not invested as much of herself in her grandchildren as she might have done, mainly because of the demands of her work. Her third third transition into retirement has given her the opportunity to spend much more time with her grandchildren, a responsibility she takes as seriously as she once did

leading a major business. She has found new joy in building these intergenerational relationships.[6]

Let me add that those of us without grandchildren aren't out of luck here. We can can discover ways to build and nurture relationships with younger people. These could be your neighbors, your nieces and nephews, students in the local elementary school, or the grandchildren of your friends. I think of two older couples whose influence on my own children has been tremendous, perhaps as great as that of their natural grandparents (two of whom died before my children were born). My kids got to know these couples through our church experience. The church can be an ideal place to build relationships across the generations.[7]

3. Mentoring Relationships

If you want to flourish in the third third of life, develop close, committed, loving relationships and intergenerational relationships. In particular, form mentoring relationships, which is our third category of vital relationships for third third flourishing.

Mentoring is a significant kind of intergenerational relationship in which an older person (usually) joins a younger person in a relationship of learning and growth. At the De Pree Center, we talk about mentors as those who come *alongside* the people they mentor. Mentors are people with more life experience than the person being mentored (often called the mentee). Occasionally mentors and mentees are peers, though this is uncommon. Mentoring can happen in workplaces and schools, in families and neighborhoods, in churches and service organizations, and in a wide variety of other contexts. Mentoring relationships are primarily for the benefit of the mentee, though they also enrich the life of the mentor as well. As Max De Pree has written, "Mentoring is above all a work of love, which at its best is a two-way exchange."[8]

Marc Freedman, is his delightful and informative book *How to Live Forever: The Enduring Power of Connecting the Generations*, describes a striking mentoring relationship between an older trumpet player, Clark Terry, and a blind, young, piano prodigy named Justin Kauflin. Kauflin helped Terry deal with his impending blindness, while Terry helped

Kauflin grow as a musician and a human being. The beautiful relationship between Terry and Kauflin is portrayed in the 2014 documentary film, *Keep on Keepin' On*. After Terry died in 2015, people would ask Kauflin about Terry, "What was the most important thing he said?" Kauflin's answer points to the relational dynamic of mentoring: "And that always bothers me because the thing that stands out the most is the person he was when I was around him in all the different situations we were in . . . . It was incredible to witness . . . and then, of course, just to be with him at the house, just relaxing, and still having that joy and that light constantly shining, was something that really sticks with me, more so than anything he ever said"[9]

Many of us don't get into mentoring relationships because we sell ourselves short. We feel as if we don't have enough knowledge or wisdom. Or we don't mentor others because we don't have places to get to know folks who are younger than we are and interested in mentoring. Here, once again, the church can help. We can give potential mentors what they need to try it out. In church we can build bridges of friendship between generations. The fact is that mentoring is more about sharing life with people than it is sharing your great ideas with them. (I should add, by the way, that I am currently involved with a research project through my third third work at the De Pree Center. We're seeking to identify mentoring best practices so that we can build a training course for potential third third mentors. This course will be available in a few months. If you sign up for the De Pree Center's *Third Third Life* e-newsletter, we'll keep you informed on our progress. Or you can check out the links in the notes for this lecture.)

Conclusion

I know I've given you a lot to think about in this message. If you check the notes in the workbook, you can find a summary of all the main points as well as the key references and links. The main points of this teaching are pretty simple, though:

> First, *Scripture teaches us and science shows us that relationships are essential for third third flourishing*.

Second, build and nurture close, committed, loving relationships, such as those you share with family and friends.

Third, build and nurture intergenerational relationships, like those that you have with your grandchildren if you're a grandparent. Don't limit your generativity to your own family, however. Invest yourself in relationships for the future in your family, your church, and your community.

Finally, be open to mentoring younger folk, joining in relationships of mutual learning and growth. It's not mainly what you say to your mentees that matters, but who you are with them that can make such a difference. You can help them become more fully the people God has created them to be.

Blessings to you, friends, as you seek to flourish in the third third of life through relationships, relationships, relationships.

33:20

Longer Sections

In the fall of 1938, a new program began at Harvard University. Originally called "The Harvard Longitudinal Study," it soon became known as "The Grant Study of Social Adjustments." It was called the Grant Study because the donor who initially funded the study was William T. Grant, owner of a large chain of department stores known as W. T. Grant or just Grants. (By the way, you had these stores in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. In fact, the Grants building in downtown Ft. Worth at the corner of 6th and Houtson is now the Library Bar, but you can still see "Grants" in stone on the outside.) Anyway, the focus of the Grant Study was human health and wellbeing. Rather than studying abnormal psychology – as was common at that time – the Grant study sought to discover what was normal, healthy, and positive in human development and experience. The study hoped to provide guidance for young men (Harvard was all male at that time) as they sought to live well and contribute to society.

Initially, the study focused on 268 recruits from the Harvard classes of 1939, 1940, and 1941. One of those recruits was a young man named, John F. Kennedy, who was a member of the Harvard class of 1940. The recruits underwent extremely thorough medical and psychological examinations, including in-depth interviews of the participants and their families. This level of scrutiny continued throughout the lifetimes of the study participants. By 2017, 19 of or the original 268 were still alive, all well into their nineties.

In time, the Grant Study became known as the Harvard Study of Adult Development. Research from similar projects was added to diversify the participants, including studies of young men from lower class Boston neighborhoods and women from the Terman study at Stanford in California. The Harvard Study of Adult Development is called longitudinal because it followed its participants for a long period of time, in some cases over 75 years.

If you're curious about the Harvard Study of Adult Development, I'd recommend a fascinating book by one of the study's directors, George Vaillant. The Triumph of Experience tells a fascinating story and has much to teach us about how to flourish (and not flourish) throughout life. I've based my description of the Harvard study on Vaillant's book.

I'm focusing our attention on this study, not only because it's captivating, but also because it helps to address our flourishing question. *How can we flourish in the third third of life?* So, then, let's examine what we can we learn from the Harvard Study of Adult Development that will help us live fully and fruitfully in older adulthood.

Though this study has produced mountains of documentation, I'm glad to say that its directors have summarized the study's findings for us in very accessible ways. Perhaps the most available is a TED talk by current director Dr. Robert Waldinger. *What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness* was given in 2015. Since then it has been watched over 40,000,000 times!

Here's how Waldinger summarizes the findings of the Adult Development study:

> So what have we learned? What are the lessons that come from the tens of thousands of pages of information that we've generated on these lives? Well, the lessons aren't about wealth or fame or working harder and harder. The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: *Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period*.

Waldinger adds another surprising result of the Harvard study:

> Once we had followed our men all the way into their 80s, we wanted to look back at them at midlife and to see if we could predict who was going to grow into a happy, healthy octogenarian and who wasn't. And when we gathered together everything we knew about them at age 50, it wasn't their middle age cholesterol levels that predicted how they were going to grow old. It was *how satisfied they were in their relationships. The people who were the most satisfied in their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80*.

In his commendation of relationships, Waldinger concurs with George Vaillant, a previous director of the Harvard Study. Vaillant once observed, "When the study began, nobody cared about empathy or attachment. But the key to healthy aging is *relationships, relationships, relationships*."

Now that's about as clear as it gets, don't you think? "The key to healthy aging is *relationships, relationships, relationships*." Or, as Vaillant writes in his book, *Triumphs of Experience*, "[I]t was the *capacity for intimate relationships* that predicted *flourishing* in all aspects of these men's lives" (p. 40).

So, that's what we learn from the Harvard Study of Adult Development. I'd like you to hold this high estimation of relationships in your mind as we examine a different perspective on how relationships contribute to a flourishing third third life.

[1] The good works God has prepared for us, mentioned in Ephesians 2:10, are not just for individual Christians. Rather, they are for the body of Christ together. Listen to what it says in Ephesians 5:8-9, "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. *Live as children of light* – for the *fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true*." Notice that we are to live as "children" – plural – of light. In family-like relationship with each other, we produce "the fruit of light," namely, "all that is good and right and true." Talk about fruitfulness!

The latter chapters of Ephesians show us in detail how we are to live as redeemed and reconciled people. We are to be patient and gentle with each other (4:2). We are to speak the truth to each other in loving, committed relationships (4:15). We are to share together in doing God's work in the church and the world (4:15-16). We are to do good work in our jobs and to be generous with what we earn (4:28). We are to use our words to build up rather than to tear down (4:29). We are to replace bitter anger with tenderhearted forgiveness (4:31-32). Most of all, we are to love each other, even as God has loved us through Christ (5:1-2). This kind of sacrificial love will transform all of our relationships, including the central life relationships of marriage, family, and work. (5:21-6:9).

[2] The Harvard Study also showed, however, that a bad marriage was detrimental to health.

[3] For example, an article called "Friendship in Later Life: A Research Agenda" observes, "Studies consistently show that friend relationships are as important as family ties in predicting psychological well-being in adulthood and old age." In 2017, Dr. William Chopik of Michigan State University published the results of his study of relationships across the lifespan. He found

[4] See also "To Age Well, You Need Friends" in *Psychology Today*.

The Bible teaches us to view our Christian communities as families as even more than friendship groups. We are not just fellow believers, but also brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to love one another and share life together as members of a family bound together by deep commitments. Our relationships with our sisters and brothers in Christ can be some of the most precious, formational, and rewarding in all of life. Of course, they can also be trying, frustrating, and disappointing. That's part of what makes them so formational. Yet, we have within the community of Christ followers the opportunity to develop the kind of relationships that will, among other things, help us thrive throughout all seasons of life, including the third third.
Dale's response in small group and visiting Bill

[5] It turns out that mutuality is crucial to healthy relationships between older and younger people. Again, I draw from George Vaillant in *Aging Well*, who makes this comment while talking about generativity: "Paradoxically, the Study members who learned most from the next generation had been also the most successful at caring for them" (p. 132). The older adults didn't just teach the younger. They learned from them! Their brains were stretched and transformed by their intergenerational relationships. Along these lines Vaillant observes, "The majority of generative men and women . . . had mastered the reciprocity involved in caring for and in learning from children" (p. 133). I always knew I learned a lot from Poppy. Now, in retrospect, I realize that he also learned a lot from me. How delightful is that!

[6] Link to Larry Fowler

[7] There are many ways to build intergenerational relationships at church. I know many third third folk who teach Sunday School or who lead the church's outreach to orphanages in Mexico. That's just the beginning.

If you think younger folk in church don't need you because you're older, think again. My colleagues in the Fuller Youth Institute did an expansive study a few years ago, trying to figure out what helped churches to attract and thrive with younger people. They published their results in the book called *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. One of their key findings:

While peer friendships are crucial, a variety of analyses suggest that intergenerational relationships are also incredibly important. Specifically, churches with close intergenerational relationships show higher faith maturity and vibrancy . . . . (Kindle location 2434)

To put it simply, intergenerational relationships in church attract young people. This conclusion makes us wonder how we can build such relationships in our lives and in our churches. *Growing Young* offers an intriguing suggestion:

While intergenerational relationships can develop naturally, two primary avenues through which churches strategically integrate generations are mentoring and worship. Mentoring often develops through one-on-one discipleship, vocational guidance, or shared ministry work. (Kindle location 2446)

[8] (in *Mentoring* by Walter C. Wright, p. viii).

[9] (Freedman, pp. 130-131). (If you haven't seen *Keep on Keepin' On*, you can rent or buy it from Amazon Prime.)

I remember clearly the first time anyone referred to me as a potential mentor. I was in my late 50s, speaking at Laity Lodge Family Camp, when a group of dads approached me. "We'd like you to mentor us during this week," they said. I was surprised, not only by their interest, but also by the fact that they were only about a dozen years younger than I was. How could I be a mentor for folks so close to my own age? I feared maybe they thought I was older than I really was because of my gray hair! But, as it turned out, they didn't need me to be older or wiser than I was. They didn't need lectures on how to be good at work and home. What they needed most of all was my companionship on their journey. They needed me to ask questions and listen well. They wanted to hear about my life. And they wanted my prayers.