

# New Narratives for Third Third Flourishing

## Main Point

Scripture, with support from science, affirms the promise of flourishing in the third third of life. Given the negative narratives of aging in our culture, however, if we're going to flourish, we need new narratives, truthful narratives that free and empower us. These narratives will help us to flourish in community together as we live fully and fruitfully for God's purposes and glory.

## Introduction

Today we come to the last section of our course, *Flourishing in the Third Third of Life*. We've covered a lot of ground in the last five sections, ground which, I hope, has proved to be fertile for you.

In this lecture I'd like to circle back to the first section because today's content builds on and responds to what I talked about at the beginning. The first and last sections of this course are complementary bookends, with tonight's bookend reflecting what we have learned throughout the whole course.

I began the first lecture by defining the terms "third third" and "flourishing." Then, I wondered if flourishing, that is living fully and fruitfully, is possible for those of us in the third third of life. I noted that popular cultural narratives would say "No. When you're old, your time of flourishing has passed." I mentioned three common negative narratives: "It's All About You;" "Dependency and Damage;" and "Disability vs. Capability." But, in contrast to these narratives, I presented the truth of Scripture, which offers a different promise, the promise of flourishing "even in old age," according to Psalm 92.

In this lecture, we'll focus on several foundational biblical passages, including Psalm 92 once again. From these texts, we'll be reminded of what is essential if we're going to flourish in the third third of life. Then, in response to the negative narratives, we'll consider new, life-giving narratives based on what we have learned in this course from Scripture and science. These narratives will celebrate the fact that, as the people of God, we *can* live fully and fruitfully in the third third of life.

## The Promise of Psalm 92 and Related Bible Passages

Psalm 92 is foundational for this course and for our experience of flourishing as we get older. Psalm 92:12-15 proclaims:

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,  
showing that the LORD is upright;  
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

This passage brings to light several key truths:

1. “The righteous flourish . . . .” Living fully and fruitfully is a result of being righteous, that is, living in a right-relationship with God and people.
2. We flourish when we are “planted in the house of the LORD,” that is when we are deeply rooted in God and God’s people.
3. Those who are right with God and people flourish even “in old age.”
4. Flourishing, from a biblical perspective, includes fruitfulness. It involves making a difference in the world.
5. Our flourishing shows “that the LORD is upright.” It bears witness to the character of God, who is both righteous and utterly reliable.

Reading this psalm as Christians, we understand that our righteousness comes from God through Jesus Christ. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” That’s a solid biblical promise and we are standing firmly upon it. Thus, when we are righteous through Christ, when we live in right-relationship with God and people, then we can flourish in every season of life, including the third third.<sup>i</sup>

In the Gospel of John, Jesus reaffirms what we learn from Psalm 92, though using the image of a vine and branches rather than a tree and fruit. He says in John 15,

Abide in me as I abide in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. . . . My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples (15:4-5, 8).

We will live fruitfully when we abide in Christ, when we draw sustenance from the One who gives us life. Abiding leads to bearing “much fruit,” which glorifies God.

## **Rootedness and the Fourth Third of Life**

For most of us, the third third of life begins sometime in our 50s and extends into our 70s and 80s, perhaps even 90s or more. Yes, maybe even more than 90s. The [United Nations estimates](#) that there are now over a half-million centenarians in the world today, that is, people 100 years or older.<sup>ii</sup>

Being rooted in God is essential to our flourishing in the third third of life whether we’re 55 or 105. But our relationship with God is not only for this mortal life. *An intimate relationship with God through Christ is essential preparation for what I call the “fourth third” of life*, that is, life beyond this life, the life of the age to come, or what we usually refer to as heaven.

Though there is no single, set story of third third flourishing, one absolute certainty for all of us is the fact that the third third of life ends in death. That’s true for every human being, except, I suppose, Elijah and Enoch in the Bible (Gen 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11). No matter how fully and fruitfully we are living, no matter how much we steward well the temples of our bodies, our time on earth in this age will come to an end. Yet that does not mean our lives are over. By God’s grace in Christ, we will live past our physical death, experiencing fullness and fruitfulness in the age to come beyond anything we can imagine.

Being rooted in God prepares us for this amazing future. It also helps us deal with the losses and limitations that come with aging, especially in the last years of life. Thus, *abiding in Christ not only enables us to live fruitfully, but also helps us to endure the pains of dusty humanness while preparing us for the glory of the age to come* (2 Cor 5:7-18). Intimacy with God through Christ equips us to fulfill one of the key tasks of the third third of life, namely, getting ready for the fourth third.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Negative Narratives Once More**

As you will recall, in our first session together I summarized three popular negative narratives of aging that permeate our culture and squash our flourishing. These narratives were as follows:

*Negative Narrative #1 – The third third of life is a time when it's all about you.* You had to care for others before, now, in retirement, it's all about you. You will be able to enjoy a pleasurable life, but you won't be living fruitfully, making a difference that matters, and that's just fine because life is all about you now.

*Negative Narrative #2 – The third third of life is a time for dependency and damage.* Older adults, because of their dependency on others, are damaging the common good. They constitute the “Gray Wave” or “Silver Tsunami” that threatens our way of life, especially our economic prosperity.<sup>iv</sup>

*Negative Narrative #3 – The third third of life is a time of disability vs. capability.* Older adults are past their prime, past their time to contribute. As Mark Zuckerberg said, “Young people are just smarter.” Folks in the third third have liabilities and disabilities, not abilities and capabilities. This narrative was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, since older people were, in general, more likely to be disabled by it.

Such pervasive and popular negative narratives limit our potential for living fully and fruitfully when they are imposed upon us from the outside and when we absorb them to into our minds, hearts, and lives. We begin to see ourselves as people of dependency and disability who are free only to live for ourselves. That's a problem, to be sure. Moreover, these negative narratives are not consistent with either biblical truth or with the findings of serious scholarly research in gerontology, psychology, sociology, medicine, and other disciplines.

## **New Narratives for Third Third Flourishing**

Therefore, if we are going to flourish in the third third of life, then we need new narratives. If we're going to help the world be a place where older adults are encouraged and enabled to live fully and fruitfully, then we need new narratives, better narratives, truer narratives.

In a moment I'm going to suggest several new narratives. These emerge from the content of this course. They oppose the negative narratives with positive stories based on Scripture and science, as well as the experience of many thriving older adults.

As I present these new narratives, I'm not denying the fact that aging inevitably involves losses and limitations. Scripture reminds us of this fact (see Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, for example). Especially in the latter years of life, we will experience physical decline and we may become more dependent upon others. So, in embracing better narratives, we're not pretending that we can live without challenges, losses, and even eventual death.

It's also crucial to understand that *older adults have widely different personal stories and experiences*. The [American Psychological Association website observes](#), "Many assume that older adults are all alike. However, as this age group includes five decades of individuals, the differences among older adults are great — actually greater than those seen in other age groups." Dr. Manfred Diehl, director of the [Adult Development and Aging Project](#) at Colorado State University [observes](#), "Older adults are actually the most diverse age group, but they are often seen as unilaterally frail, vulnerable or even expendable."<sup>v</sup>

I expect you are familiar, from personal experience, with diversity among older adults. Most third thirders, for example, are fairly healthy well into their seventies and even beyond, though some struggle with difficult medical issues in their 50s and 60s, including early-onset dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Then there are others who are physically and mentally robust well into their 80s and 90s. My friend Dale walks several miles each day and just this year published a wonderful new commentary on Romans . . . at 89 years of age. Now he's working on a commentary on Isaiah. I'm not kidding.

Other diversities are common for people in the third third. Some have adequate financial resources for retirement, while others face financial limitations that make ordinary retirement difficult or impossible. Many older adults are happily married, while others live with conflicted marriages, widowhood, or singleness. These and so many other differences make it impossible to craft a single story of flourishing for all people in the third third. Yet, with Scripture as our foundation and with input from scholarly research, I am convinced that flourishing is possible in older adulthood, though it will take on a variety of forms depending on individual situations. It would be

wrong to assume that flourishing is possible only for those with wealth, health, or privilege, though these advantages make a difference, of course.

In this talk I will propose six new narratives that are correlated with the six sections of this course. After these six, I'll add one additional narrative that lays out a broad vision of third third flourishing.

### **New Narrative #1 – The third third of life is a time to live fully and fruitfully.**

Based on Scripture passages such as Psalm 92:12-15, and reflecting relevant academic research, the “full and fruitful living” narrative rejects common negative narratives. It affirms that older adults can flourish both in terms of personal well-being and productivity, that is, making a difference that matters in the world. Different people will have different experiences, given their particular situations, but the promise of full and fruitful living applies to all who are in right-relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

I've emphasized the fact that, from a biblical perspective, flourishing includes fruitfulness. It entails making a difference in the world. But flourishing is also about personal well-being, about feeling fulfilled and even happy. We may wonder: Is happiness possible for people in the third third? It turns out that it's not only possible, but likely.

Dr. Laura Carstensen is one of the world's top experts on aging as a professor of psychology and director of the Stanford Center on Longevity. In 2011, Dr. Carstensen presented the findings of her research in a TEDx talk entitled, “[Older People Are Happier](#).” In this talk, she observed, “Now there are problems associated with aging -- diseases, poverty, loss of social status. It's hardly time to rest on our laurels. But the more we learn about aging, the clearer it becomes that a sweeping downward course is grossly inaccurate. Aging brings some rather remarkable improvements -- increased knowledge, expertise -- and emotional aspects of life improve. That's right, older people are happy. They're happier than middle-aged people, and younger people, certainly. . . . Study after study is coming to the same conclusion.”<sup>vi</sup>

Carstensen's research, and that of the Stanford Center on Longevity, support the new narrative of full and fruitful living in the third third.

## **New Narrative #2 – The third third of life is a time to experience generative relationships.**

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “generativity” as “a need to nurture and guide younger people and contribute to the next generation.” We live out our generativity through generative relationships with people from younger generations. The significance of generativity as we age was first emphasized by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. In his earlier writings, he saw generativity as crucial for middle-adulthood, ages 40-65. But as he got older, Erikson recognized that a concern for generativity remains strong. Thus, he wrote in *The Life Cycle Completed*, “[I]ndeed, old people can and need to maintain a grand-generative function” (p. 64).

This “grand-generative function” is found in Scripture. In Psalm 71, for example, the psalm writer prays,

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. (71:17-18)<sup>vii</sup>

As we have seen previously, intergenerational relationships are great for our brains. But they also are a context for us to express our generativity as we prepare younger people for a full and fruitful life.

## **New Narrative #3 – The third third of life is a time to live for God’s glory in your body, a temple of the Holy Spirit.**

According to 1 Corinthians 6:19, the very Spirit of God dwells within you, making your body a temple for God. Moreover, because you were bought with the price of Christ’s bodily death, you should “therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20).

Paul makes a similar point in Romans 12:1, though using different imagery: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” When we take seriously the biblical vision of our bodies as temples and living sacrifices, we will be inspired to steward our bodies well so we might use them for God’s glorious purposes. We will

worship God through how we care for and employ our bodies to live for the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:11-14).

Because our bodies are so special to God, we will pay particular attention to matters of physical health and well-being, but not with obsession or shame. Rather, we will take care of and use our bodies well in response to God's grace.

Of course, as we get older we experience various kinds of physical decline. But we are not helpless when it comes to how our bodies and minds age. A [recent news feature](#) on the American Psychological Association website bore this intriguing headline, "Older adults have more control over their aging than they think." This article quotes Dr. Manfred Diehl, director of the [Adult Development and Aging Project](#) at Colorado State, who says, "Aging is a much more plastic process than was previously thought. That means middle-aged and older adults have more control over the way they grow older than they believe."<sup>viii</sup>

So, though our bodies will experience decline as we age, we have more opportunity than we might imagine to steward well our temples of the Holy Spirit so we might glorify God in the things we do with our bodies.

#### **New Narrative #4 – The third third of life is a time to remember and be grateful.**

As your brain ages, you become a "nostalgia factory," to use the phrase coined by psychologist Douwe Draaisma. You're apt to remember experiences and people from decades ago, even from your earliest days.

Research shows that it's not healthy to glorify the past or want to return to it. What's called historical nostalgia does not help you flourish. But personal nostalgia, bittersweet remembrance of your past, can be good for your brain, helping you connect and integrate the different seasons and experiences of your life.

Remembering good things from the past can also inspire gratitude, and gratitude is an essential element of third third flourishing. We offer thanks to God because God deserves it and Scripture commands it, but also because it helps us flourish and opens us up to receive even more of God's blessings.

Gratitude is possible, perhaps even deepened, by the losses we experience in the third third of life. I'll never forget a prayer I heard in a Thanksgiving Eve service at Irvine Presbyterian Church. We had a tradition in that church of gathering the night before Thanksgiving for worship. Our service included an extended time for people in the congregation to offer their thanks to God either silently or out loud. In one of these prayer times, an older woman named Betty began to pray. I wondered what she would say because she had only recently lost her husband. "Heavenly Father," she prayed, "I want to thank you for my dear husband, Dick. He was such a wonderful man and we had such a beautiful life together. Thank you for Dick. Lord, you know I miss him terribly. But I thank you that his suffering is over and that he is now with you. Thank you, Lord, for your love for us."

When Betty finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the place. She demonstrated powerfully that, yes, it is possible to be grateful even amid painful losses.

### **New Narrative #5 – The third third of life is a time to respond to God's call to purposeful living.**

Scripture reveals that God calls us based on God's purpose for the whole creation as well as for our lives (Rom 8:28). When God calls us, we are called to a life of purpose. We are called to participate in God's work in the world. God's purpose becomes our primary purpose because of God's calling.

If we're going to flourish in the third third of life, we need to live with purpose greater than our own personal pleasure. Third third flourishing is not "all about you." It's about so much more. Full and fruitful living is all about living into God's purpose for the world, for the church, and for your life.

Scripture teaches that every Christian has a calling, a primary or general calling that leads to secondary or particular callings. Our primary calling is to know and serve God, to love God and our neighbor. This calling will be expressed in a variety of secondary callings, through which we respond to God's call upon our lives and live each day with transcendent purpose.

### **New Narrative #6 – The third third of life is a time to grow deeply in God so that you might bear much fruit.**

The righteous person flourishes in the third third of life when his or her roots grow deeply into the soil of God's presence and people. We've seen this in

Psalm 92, where the righteous flourish by being planted in the house of the Lord. The result is bearing fruit “even in old age.” In John 15, Jesus says that we will bear “much fruit” when we abide in him, thus glorifying God (John 15:4-8). If we want to live fully and fruitfully, we must live in a right and deepening relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This relationship is something we experience as members of the body of Christ, the temple built from all God’s people together (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22).

Being rooted in God not only helps us flourish in the third third of life, but also prepares us for the fourth third, that is, for life beyond this life, life in the age to come, life in heaven. Since an essential task in the third third is getting ready for the fourth third, abiding in Christ is doubly essential and doubly fruitful.

## **Review**

To review, the six new narratives I’m proposing are these:

1. The third third of life is a time to *live fully and fruitfully*.
2. The third third of life is a time to experience *generative relationships*.
3. The third third of life is a time to *live for God’s glory in your body, a temple of the Holy Spirit*.
4. The third third of life is a time *to remember and be grateful*.
5. The third third of life is a time to *respond to God’s call to purposeful living*.
6. The third third of life is a time to *grow deeply in God so that you might bear much fruit*.

In addition to these six new narratives, I want to add one more, a sort of global narrative that touches all of the six.

**New Narrative #7 – The third third of life is a time to live fully and fruitfully in fellowship together as brothers and sisters in the family of God.**

This final new narrative looks broadly at all we have learned in this course. It captures the promise of God in Scripture. As the people of God, we can flourish. We can live fully and fruitfully in the third third of life. Living fully, or

as Jesus would say, abundantly (John 10:10), is a matter of taking hold of “the life that really is life,” to quote the Apostle Paul (2 Tim 6:19). Living fruitfully is walking in the good works God has prepared for us (Eph 2:10). It’s what happens, according to Jesus, when we abide in him (John 15:4-8). Flourishing, therefore, from a biblical perspective, is living well and living productively.

Scripture is clear that this kind of living is *not something we do in isolation*. Rather, we will flourish as members of the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in God’s family. What the Bible commends is supported by neuroscience, which shows how relationships enrich our brains as well as our lives. Developmental psychology concurs. You’ll remember the unforgettable statement of Dr. George Vaillant, former director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development. “The key to healthy aging,” Vaillant said, “is *relationships, relationships, relationships*.”

My friends, if you take only one thing away from this course, I hope you hold on tight to the value of relationships for flourishing in the third third of life. That was the focus of Section 2, of course, where we learned from the Harvard Study that if you want to be thriving when you’re 80, focus on the quality of your relationships, and not just in the third third, but in earlier life as well. Good relationships at age 50 predict flourishing at age 80.

The value of relationships showed up in Section 3 when we talked about how to steward well the temple of your body. Trustworthy advice from health experts consistently emphasizes the importance of relationships for physical and mental health.

In Section 4, as we talked about gratitude, we were reminded of how sharing thanks with others enriches relationships, both peer relationships and intergenerational relationships.

Section 5, which focused on purpose and calling, showed that living with purpose is essential to third third flourishing, but purpose tends to fade as we age. What helps older adults maintain a strong sense of purpose? The research says this: “[S]ocial integration, and in particular a high quality of social contacts, showed the strongest association with purpose in life.” So, if you want to live with purpose, nurture “a high quality of social contacts.” Focus on deep, growing, loving relationships.

I am emphasizing the importance of relationships because they matter so much to your flourishing. Scripture says so. Science says so. But I'm making this point strongly for another reason as well. You see, it's quite common for older adults to experience increasing isolation and loneliness, that is, to have fewer close relationships as we age. The Centers for Disease Control report that "more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated" (drawing from [Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults](#)).

It's not hard to imagine why isolation and loneliness is common among older adults. For many of us, work was the center of our relational network. So, when we retired, we lost connection with many colleagues and friends. Of course, some of our relational losses are more painful. We can lose a spouse or a best friend or even a child.<sup>ix</sup>

Experiences like this will come as we get older. But we do not need to grieve alone. Remember the exhortation in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." What a great word for those of us in the third third of life! In our joys and our sorrows, we have each other, brothers and sisters in the family of God. We need our fellow Christians and they need us.

I was sharing this teaching in a Sunday School class for older adults recently. A few days later one of the men from the class was eager to talk with me. "I heard what you taught us," he said enthusiastically, "and I did something about it. I started going again to my men's prayer group, something I had stopped when the pandemic was bad. I learned that one of the men wasn't doing well. He's in his nineties now. He recently lost his wife and is struggling with health issues so he can't come to the group. I called him up. We talked and then I went for a visit. We had a great time. I want you to know your teaching really made a difference."<sup>x</sup>

## **Conclusion**

My friends, this course was created to help you flourish in the third third of your life. Imagine the impact upon your families, friends, neighborhoods, churches, and cities if you and your peers were living fully and fruitfully for God and his glory.

Today in the United States, approximately 10,000 people turn 65. Most have no idea of the things we've talked about in this course. Many are saddled with the negative narratives that will keep them from flourishing. Many have little hope that the next 20 years of their lives could be filled with meaning, purpose, productivity, generativity, friendship, and joy. Our third third comrades desperately need to know that God has a purpose for them. They can live full and meaningful lives in the third third, even as they prepare for the fourth third. We can help them hear and live the new narratives for the third third.

I'd like to conclude this final lecture by returning to the passage of Scripture upon which this course is built. In the first lecture I spent a good bit of time examining Psalm 92:12-15. I can think of no better way to end this course than by reading that wonderful passage once again:

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.  
showing the the LORD is upright;  
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.  
- Psalm 92:12-15

Thanks be to God!

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<sup>i</sup> Using similar imagery, Jeremiah 17:7-8 reiterates what we learn from Psalm 92:

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.  
They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.  
It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Those who trust in the Lord are like deeply-rooted trees, so that even amid heat and drought they continue to be green and fruitful. The person who trusts in and is deeply rooted in the Lord “does not

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cease to bear fruit.” This affirms the potential for fruitful third third living. Even as we get older, we do not cease to bear fruit.

ii The [Pew Research Center projects](#) that this number will grow to 3.7 million centenarians by 2050.

iii The first time I watched someone getting well-prepared for the fourth third was in the 1990s. I was a young pastor and Helen was an older member of my church. Well into her 80s, she had a variety of physical challenges which had limited her activity. I visited Helen several times in her home. The last time I was with her she was unable to get out of bed.

I asked Helen how she was doing. “I’m wonderful,” she said. “I know I don’t have much time left and I’m ready to go.”

“I’m so glad to hear that,” I responded, relieved that Helen brought up the subject of her approaching death. “What has helped you get ready for dying, Helen?”

“Oh,” she replied happily, “I talk with Jesus all the time. He comes and sits here with me, right in the chair where you’re sitting now. We talk about my life and heaven. Jesus is helping me get ready to die. It’s almost time for me to go and be with him. I’m looking forward to that.”

I had never before heard someone talk about Jesus and death that way. Helen experienced him as if he were physically present with her. I wasn’t quite sure what to make of this. I knew she wasn’t pretending. And her mind was very sharp. Whatever was actually going on, it was abundantly clear that Helen’s relationship with the Lord was deep, active, and intimate. She was rooted in God, abiding in Christ, and therefore ready for what was coming next. In fact, Helen was so ready that in our last meeting she gave me the order for her memorial service, including all the hymns and Scripture readings. She was indeed ready to go.

iv By the way, I recently learned an official phrase in economics: “[the old-age dependency ratio](#).” This is the number of individuals aged 65 and over per 100 people of working age defined as those aged between 20 and 64.” Notice the assumption built into this academic measurement. Older people are assumed to be financially dependent on younger people. They are not productive contributors to the economy. That’s the dependency and damage narrative built into economics.

v Research shows that diversity among older adults in the United States will continue to increase. A [report from the U.S. Census Bureau](#) projects that by, 2050, the population of older adults will be much more diverse than it is today, owing to racial-ethnic variety in addition to other kinds of diversity.

vi If that sounds too rosy, Carstensen offers a bit more nuance, “Now it’s really too simplistic to say that older people are ‘happy.’ In our study, they are more positive. But they’re also more likely than younger people to experience mixed emotions -- sadness at the same time you experience happiness; you know, that tear in the eye when you’re smiling at a friend. And other research has

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shown that older people seem to engage with sadness more comfortably. They're more accepting of sadness than younger people are.”

<sup>vii</sup> Similarly, in Deuteronomy 4:9, Moses said to the Israelites:

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

<sup>viii</sup> “Many people think the way we grow older is genetically determined,” Diehl adds, “That misconception is dangerous because it prevents many adults from taking action that could help them age in a more positive way.”

<sup>ix</sup> • I was talking with a man in his early seventies about his third third experience. He told me how much he was loving his life, which was filled with meaningful volunteer work and a strong marriage. “My life right now is great,” he said, but then he paused for several awkward seconds. “Except,” he added, “last year I lost my lifelong best friend. We were together for 60 years. I’ll never have a friend like him again, and I miss him terribly.”

<sup>x</sup> I felt grateful for this man’s story and I was reminded by his example to reach out to those who might easily become isolated. The next week at church, I saw a woman whose husband passed away last year on Thanksgiving Day. Rather than merely saying “Hi,” I stopped to ask her pointedly how she was doing. We had a sweet conversation about her husband and how her life is going now. I was able to weep with her as she wept and to rejoice as she rejoiced. In the end, as we hugged, I could tell how much it meant to her. And my heart knew how much it meant to me.