



Getting Young

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).

Becoming like a little child means accepting the reality that we are helpless to do anything to add to our spiritual stature. Little children cannot earn the love of their parents, neither are they capable of worrying about losing the love of their father or mother. As mature adults we are God's little children, unable to earn the love of our heavenly Father by doing stuff that will make God like us.

Becoming like a little child means abandoning all our futile attempts to control our destiny. It means surrendering spiritual illusions, presuming we can make God love us more on the basis of our spiritual performance.

Spiritually, becoming like a little child means trusting in God and being dependent upon him. Physically, there are generally two times in our lives when we are dependent—when we are young (all of us) and when we are old (some, but not all of us).

I'm thinking of my mother-in-law. Joan turns 84 this month. In a relatively short period of time she lost her independence and found herself in a state of dependence. She is now barely able to walk and needs assistance with many things more agile people perform without even thinking.

One day, a few months before Joan needed to move to a full-care facility, my wife Karen, who is Joan's eldest daughter, took her mother out to lunch. Karen noticed a young man at the next table watching them as they conversed and ate. She forgot about him until it came time to pay the bill. The waitress came over and said that the man at the next table had paid for their meals, and that he had left a note.

Here's some of what the note said: "My mom takes care of my grandma in Oregon. It is a responsibility that can be very difficult at times, but also very rewarding. I don't get to Oregon as often as I'd like, so I can't take

them to dinner or mow their lawn. That's why it was so nice to see you both here enjoying a nice meal like my mom and grandma do on occasion. Even if this beautiful elderly woman sitting next to you is not your mother, I applaud you for the care you're giving her. Please accept my payment for your meal—it was almost like being with my mom and grandma. God bless."

That night my wife handed me the note and watched as I read it. We both welled up with tears. In fact, even now as I type I am choking up a little. It is painful to watch a loved one gradually fade away, all the while desperately trying to stop the inevitable.

The wisdom of Solomon tells us, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart" (Ecclesiastes 7:2). When caring for or visiting the aged, disabled and handicapped one is enveloped by the unalterable and inescapable. In cases of institutional care, no matter how warm, cozy and cheerful the staff and environment may be, one realizes that these are people who are deemed to be virtually worthless by the standards of our consumer driven, productive society.

Advertisers don't target this demographic, for these seniors usually have little money nor ability to spend it if they do. These dear people cannot do much, if anything. They are just there. What good are they, physically or spiritually? They certainly can't meet the standards of performance-based religion. They are like little children in many ways.

Perhaps that's just the point we need to learn from those who cannot communicate, think or ambulate. The aged and infirmed can help us to realize our own handicaps. They can help us to see the futility of being convinced that God is only pleased with us when we perform according to his standards.

Years ago someone sent me an interesting thought about youth. I don't recall who should receive credit for it, but here it is:

Becoming like a little child means accepting the reality that we are helpless to do anything to add to our spiritual stature.

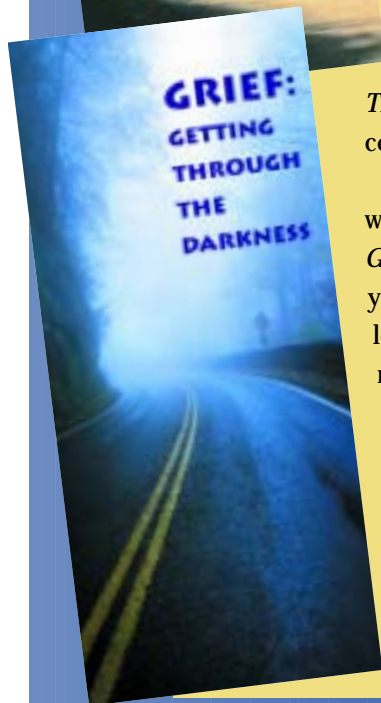
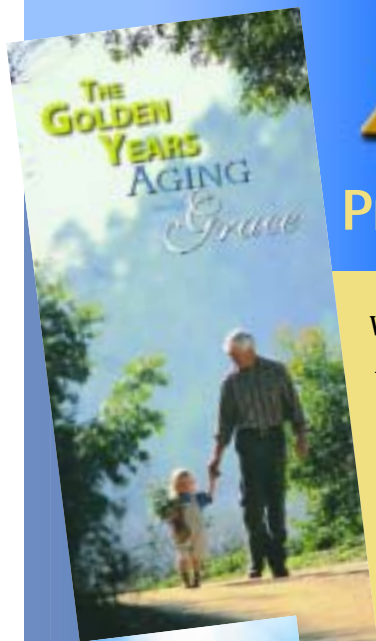
The cycle of life is all backward. You should die first, then live 20 years in an old age home before you eventually get kicked out because you're too young. Then you have to go to work. After 40 years you become young enough to retire, but first you get to go to college, high school, middle school, elementary school and everyone's personal favorite, pre-school. By that time you have reached the point where you are completely dependent. Then your final stage of life occurs when you become a little baby, entering into your mother's womb, and spend nine months floating. Life before birth? You spend eternity as a gleam in the eyes of both your parents and your heavenly Father.

Jesus not only told us that we must become like a little child in order to enter his kingdom, he told us we must be born again (John 3:3). I am a believer in Jesus. I believe that if "anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). I believe that Jesus will return one day and bring "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1) and that he will make everything new (vs.5).

New. It's a promise. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matthew 22:32). God is in the business of restoring, renewing and resurrecting. Even though we will all die, and before we die many of us will lose vital physical abilities, if we believe in Jesus we now have eternal life, the life of the age to come. New life is our hope, our inheritance, a promise from God.

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). □

—Greg Albrecht



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