

Too Old for God?

Think you've left it too late? Think again!

When I was an indestructible teenager I decided that I did not want to live beyond 50 years of age. All those old people with arthritis and plastic teeth; who'd want to be like them?! And as for those geriatrics who simply burdened others with their infirmities, I'd never want to be that way. So I lived it up for a while, went to war and bombed people in Germany, drove some fast cars and bragged to the girls.

Then my Dad died at age 52. I was still a teenager. It was an experience that remains vividly with me as I approach my eighty second birthday. I was away from home at the time, cycling to a place where my clarinet was being repaired, and I suddenly felt a sense of loss, a kind of knot in my stomach and a missed heartbeat. When I got home, clutching my beautifully repaired instrument, my Mother did not have to tell me the bad news; I knew Dad was dead.

I was mystified. How did I know? What had happened to me and how had it been brought about? But there was no one around to tell me what my experience meant, if it meant anything at all, so I put it behind me and applied myself to making my way in this world. Well you have to, don't you? And I'd already rejected the idea of there being a God when I was only eleven, when a clergyman teaching me about the Bible told me that some of it was true and some was not. I asked him if he knew which bits were which and he replied, "We're still finding out." With the arrogance of childhood I replied, "So when you find out, tell me, and I'll rip out the bits which are not true and read the bits which are." And at that point I left God behind me and got on with life - until Dad died.

My Dad died without knowing God, and so did my Mother over forty years later at age eighty-seven. My brother died in his fifties in the same condition, killed by anxiety and overwork. Like them, or like thousands of others in this crazy world, I could be alone in my old age too, or wondering what happens next - but I'm not.

The experience I had as a teenager never made sense, it simply remains indelibly imprinted on my mind. It may have absolutely nothing to do with anything "spiritual," and being a realistic kind of chap I'm not impressed with "signs" and "miracles" so called. What does make sense is the fact that I know I'm not alone and I do know what happens next.

I'm glad I didn't get my teenage wish and die at fifty then, because had I done so I would not have known these things, or come to know God and, as a result, been able to enjoy being old. The most amazing thing about all this is that I have done absolutely nothing to deserve what I now know and enjoy, quite the opposite. For most of my life I have lived for myself, done and thought things I would not want to put in print, never attended church, ignored my spiritual condition, and even ridiculed the idea of God.

So, why would God be so kind to me? I know for certain it's not because I was in any way "good" or "righteous" or even trying to be good. I wasn't searching for God, either, I was much more interested in me and getting what I wanted. Was there some sort of change in my life, then, an "awakening" that turned me away from my old life to a better one? No, nothing like that, either.

I was completely unaware of God, so it was he who made the first move. He picked his own time and brought me into a relationship with him. It took a while because I'm not the easiest of people to deal with.

What if he'd left it too late, then? But he didn't, and he never will. It's never too late, and we are never too old. God is for us not against us, even if we've ignored him all our life, lost our way, never been to church, and are now facing the possibility of death.

The last years of our lives were not meant to be spent in loneliness, anxiety and decline, wondering fearfully what will happen next. Yes, our physical bodies will grow old and deteriorate and we won't be able to do some of the things we used to do, but we have victory over death and fear.

That promise of victory is for you as well as for me. Paul gave us this hope when writing to the church in Corinth, in **1 Corinthians 15:54-57** (New English Bible):

“This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality. When this happens and our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of Scripture will come true, ‘Death is swallowed up. Victory is won! So, death where is *your* victory? So, death where is your *sting*?’ The sting of death is sin and sin gains its power from the law, but God be praised, he gives us the victory over ALL these things through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul really meant “ALL these things.” The victory is already won. It’s for you, for anybody, and at any time of life. When we accept this spectacular promise into our lives, old age is great. It’s full of an involvement, “usefulness,” and a peace which nothing - even this mad world in which we have to live for the time being - can disturb. There is no fear of the unknown. Every new day is a trip to be enjoyed. We can contribute and share the wisdom that the experience of years can bring, and the future is certain, too.

Do you have to “know your Bible first” for this to happen? I didn’t. Do you have to be “religious?” I wasn’t; it was religion which put me off God when I was eleven. Do you have to be a praying person? I had never prayed. What if you’re spiritually ignorant and detached from God? So was I. But none of it makes any difference to God. He sent Jesus to save people just like you and me.

Is it ever too late, then, to experience what God has to offer? It wasn’t for me, and it wasn’t for the thief who was crucified beside Jesus, either. He was promised salvation and paradise as he was dying. God is a God of love, and he will bring you into a relationship with him leading to eternal life at any time of your life. You are never too old for God!