

THE MASTER WEAVER

Isaiah 38:12

12) Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.

The ancient master weaver would always have an assistant. The role of the novice in training would be to stand on the opposite or backside of the loom and cut the incoming thread, tie off knots, and feed that same thread back through to the master weaver. Only when the project was complete could the novice step around to the front side of the loom and then view the completed picture of what the master weaver had created. From his limited working position on the backside of the loom, all the novice was aware of was the maze of tied-up knots and the indistinguishable network of frazzled jagged thread ends.

There are three basic steps in weaving. The final step that the master weaver takes is called "beating." This is the most sensitive aspect of weaving. It separates the master weaver from novice weavers. The true skill sets of weaving are revealed in the last step. Beating is the packing-in process or tightening up of the woven and engrained tapestry of the project. Today machines do this work, but in ancient days this task was performed by the hands of the master weaver. If he beat it too hard, the material would be too stiff or unsuitable for most uses, depending on its projected purpose. If he beat it too lightly, the weave or tapestry would be too loose and easily fall apart in short order. The master weaver would develop his skill through trial and error as he learned how to find the "sweet spot" needed for each individual project.

The spiritual reflection is clear. Our final days on earth often require the same process that was all too real for Hezekiah. Beating too hard can potentially and spiritually speaking leave a person bitter. Beating too lightly or "as one that beateth the air" produces an unqualified and cheapened product at the end. The master weaver knew not to rush this last step by hurrying this end-of-the-run process, lest the whole project is placed in certain peril and all of his work be lost in the end.

Not only does God highlight the vocation of the weaver to describe the final steps of life, but He also illustrates the duties of a shepherd. "As the shepherd moves his tent" to other pastures onto new feeding ground, so God reveals to Hezekiah the transition of life God must take towards death for aged men. Finally, we recognize the "beating" process that some, if not most, will experience—a "pining" sickness. "Day and night" pining away battling the end-of-life health issues common to most. God is assuring the king that He still loves him, but this is the process by divine prerogative that God chooses to employ for him.

I am currently close to two ministers of advanced age. I have been acquainted with many others throughout the years. I have noticed some common denominators with my elderly minister friends. I refer to these attributes as “The Perils Of The Aged.” I recently felt to formulate a short list of the most glaring and evidently common perils of not only both men, but of past friends also. Perils we all might potentially be faced within our life. Could this be our future also? The glaring and obvious answer for some is most likely, YES!!! God is no respecter of persons.

This brief list is far from exhaustive, nor is it conclusive, no doubt. However, it is merely a subjective opinion based on a limited eyewitness perspective.

Loneliness:

First and foremost, they contend with a strong and heavy spirit of loneliness. This trait appears to be more than the common “walking alone” type attribute we all contend with at times as ministers. Still, it truly seems to be a dark, sinister spirit with an aggressive demonic influence. Loneliness, even when not alone, is a common peril for the aged.

Insecurity:

If loneliness is indeed a kingpin spirit, then we can presume that all other perils spring forth from loneliness. Insecurity is a by-product or off-spring of the demon of loneliness. I remember reading an excerpted caption of a Twitter message that circulated throughout various publications and that originated from the late T.F. Tenney. I’m paraphrasing from memory, but in essence, he described his final days on earth as walking alone through a cold and arid place.

Loneliness. This ongoing emotional type of experience can produce deep insecurity for some—even insecurity in public speaking. Ministers find solace in the pulpit. Fulfillment in the pouring out of their spirit before men is a common experience for ministers; therefore, a certain level of comfort is always enjoyed and embraced while in a pulpit. It’s just what we do. But for the aged that are already fighting loneliness, personal insecurity may set up and produce devastating consequences.

They most likely will feel the ships have passed in the night, and their abilities to perform in a pulpit are too diminished. They may even question their anointing or perceive that due to physical decline and the deep ongoing emotional struggles, they may even feel that they no longer have anything more to offer.

Insecurities are not limited to the pulpit but also affect every social and emotional realm of life. While these challenges are not exclusive to just elderly men, they seem to be more pronounced for the aged.

Clingy:

For lack of a more proper clinical term, they become hyper-clingy. The need to belong is more highlighted for the aged than perhaps for the younger. Subsequently, they seem to crave acceptance and a sense of relevance more than ever. Most have slowed down physically, but in some ways, they have become more geared up emotionally due to the natural built-in resistance towards the unfolding and unavoidable dynamic of aging.

This creates a new challenge for them. Unable to physically get out and around as in past years, they begin to quietly and incrementally panic. An unspoken or invisible crutch is then genetically issued, as it were by nature itself. They cling to whoever and whatever, as to fill that void of irrelevance inside. As a drowning man frantically reaches for anything to stay afloat, the aged are emotionally flailing at whatever or whoever is the closest around them. Consequently, their inner circle becomes their lifeline of salvation. The need to relate and “stay in the loop” or “above water” for some cultivates the clinginess of the aged.

Regret:

Honest and pure men will have their distinct feelings of regrets once the advance of years has piled up. It would be the height of pride and deceptively disingenuous to assume we all have done everything just perfectly. The facade of “no regrets” is hypocritical or not being real. With the piled up years, comes piled up regrets for many. Not a regret of doctrinal stands taken or doctrinal teachings preached, but rather the sense of having not done more or having not been more productive is a regret for the aged.

They can feel woefully incomplete, inadequate, or even unsuccessful, more so than the norm, and to an unrealistic point that a sense of failure for not accomplishing “bigger things” in life becomes exaggerated for the aged. They may regret what they feel were the “wasted years” where they became distracted or unfocused on the higher priorities of ministry. The “missed opportunities” of yesteryear can be magnified out of proportion towards the end.

Many of us wrestle with the feelings of being unqualified overall. But for the aged, they battle the emotions and feelings of being disqualified. They feel there is no longer a legitimate place for them in ministry. Subsequently, the aged recognize the importance of young men “keeping the main things the main things” while you have youth in your favor. This is the unvarnished reality the advanced years may produce.

Fragility:

Hyper-sensitiveness is more pronounced as the aged man wrestles with his newest understanding and unveiling revelation of the brevity of life. "Where did the years go?" becomes a common theme in their mind. It's as if they are chronically aware of those that they will soon leave behind. All of the above attributes on this list weigh-in and upon them constantly by producing an insurmountable mountain of helpless despair inside of them.

They can at times be at peace, even great peace, but a peace that requires a constant battle to establish and maintain the virtue. The strongest men of faith are still men of clay feet. The reality of the unavoidable transition from young to old, and then from old unto death, begins to set in. This can create a network of daily struggles as the natural man wrestles in resistance to this process. There will be days when emotions are raw—seasons of being overwhelmed. The "nobody can possibly relate to me" or, even worse, "nobody loves me" type attitude is and can be a natural response to this emotional roller coaster that the aged are engaged in towards the end.

Ultimately God's man finds repose. Ultimately they accept the end results because they are indeed God's man. The old proverb holds great significance that "growing old ain't for sissies," and thankfully, we know that real men of God ain't "sissies." However, the emotional and spiritual battle is unavoidable for many of those that are advanced in years. As one aged man in his mid-90s once shared with me during a season of intense spiritual battle, "Bro. Pitman, if God ever offers you the opportunity to check out of here at 80, take it." That is not the sound of bitterness. It is the reality and perils of the aged. The landscape changes the older we get.

The greatest and highest climbs upward on this journey will also include the most radically dramatic and sudden changes with the lowest and steepest drops in life. The elderly are more vulnerable to these perils as they rudely discover the terrain lying before them in their advanced years. Growing old has the potential to become the consummate spiritual and emotional roller coaster towards the end for the aged. But as David proclaimed, "I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

God give us the grace to know how to finish this race, should be our prayer. Cultivate a stronger and more abiding trust as we face our final days. Teach and prepare us right now for the potential perils at the finish line. For we know the devil would receive no greater joy than to destroy a lifetime of work and steal the glory of the master weaver during his last and final workings in our life.

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