



AGING



FAITHFULLY



*The Holy Invitation
of Growing Older*

ALICE FRYLING

Foreword by Leighton Ford

I thank God for *Aging Faithfully*. It is a book for you regardless of your age, for the truth of the matter is, we are all aging . . . every single one of us. Alice Fryling lovingly leads us through the ups and downs, the losses and the treasures we experience in the interior chambers of our soul throughout our aging. I recommend Alice Fryling as a reliable and faithful guide through this multifaceted adventure of aging.

RICHARD J. FOSTER, author of *Celebration of Discipline* and *Sanctuary of the Soul*

This lovely book is full of wisdom, encouragement, and hard-won insights from one who knows whereof she speaks. And questions . . . the questions alone are worth the price of the book, helping us enter the depths of what God has for us in this stage of our human journey! The bad news is that we all need this book or will need it eventually. The good news is that with Alice as our companion, we can experience aging as a season rich with holy invitations from God leading to immense satisfaction, if we can stop resisting those invitations and just say yes!

RUTH HALEY BARTON, founder of Transforming Center,
author of *Sacred Rhythms*

Age alone does not equal spiritual, emotional, or relational maturity. Our world is filled with adolescent, false-self,

immature older adults who need the biblical wisdom, relational maturity, and graced fortitude of Alice Fryling. By prayerfully embracing our holy losses, hidden in the cross of Christ, we are ready to receive our holy invitations, advancing the Kingdom of heaven. The end-of-chapter reflections and the rich appendices are icing on this delicious piece of literary cake. Thank you, Alice!

STEPHEN A. MACCHIA, founder and president of Leadership Transformations

Getting older is one of life's journeys few of us sign up for but all of us must take. In *Aging Faithfully*, Alice Fryling draws from her decades of experience as a wise spiritual guide to equip us for this holy adventure. Reading Alice's book brought me closer to the truth that God has given me everything I need to age not only faithfully but joyfully.

PEGGY WEHMEYER, former ABC News correspondent, grandmother of five

As we move into our sixties and beyond, we experience a profound silence. The voices of our mentors are gone. Those from whom we received direction and encouragement are silenced at a time when we need their help the most. *Aging Faithfully* speaks directly into that silent space. For those of us who long to live faithfully into

maturity, this book provides direction, new possibilities, and needed encouragement. These are meant to be the most fruitful years of our lives!

MICHAEL CARD, musician, author, teacher

Alice Fryling has uncovered the secrets as to why some grow older with grace and joy while others are defeated by the inevitable losses. Her wisdom brings hope and laughter! She quotes Psalm 92, which tells how the righteous can still bear fruit in old age and be “always green and full of sap”! This isn’t just a book for the elderly; it’s also for those who love them.

DEE BRESTIN, author of *Falling in Love with Jesus* and *He Calls You Beautiful*

In this age-denying culture, thank God for Alice Fryling! She is a wise, warm, honest, and companionable guide who shows us that the “liminal space” of aging can bring unexpected growth and freedoms. Page by page, she gently corrects our nearsightedness, replacing it with beautiful, biblical ways to become “more fruitful” even as we become “less productive.” As the years pass, I know I will reach for this book again and again.

LESLIE LEYLAND FIELDS, editor of *The Wonder Years: Forty Women Over Forty on Aging, Faith, Beauty, and Strength*

Today, over ten thousand people in the United States will turn sixty-five. Very few are prepared for what lies ahead, both the incredible opportunities and the inevitable losses. Alice Fryling, in *Aging Faithfully*, is a wise and vulnerable guide who invites us to join her on a journey into deeper meaning and truer flourishing. This is an excellent book for people in the third third of life and for those who love them.

MARK D. ROBERTS, PHD, senior strategist, Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Seminary

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we can see eternity as though we're looking at it through a dim mirror. The final movement of our lives carries with it the opportunity to move closer to that mirror, where the light and shadows of old age present to us an image of God, ourselves, and others that we've not been able to fully behold at earlier stages of our lives. Alice Fryling's gentle, honest writing illuminates the losses, questions, fears, and longings we carry with us into the aging process. *Aging Faithfully* is a trustworthy guide to the light and shadows of our final stage of life on earth with honesty, offering us a gracious and hopeful sense of the welcome that awaits us on the other side of that dim mirror.

MICHELLE VAN LOON, author of *Becoming Sage: Cultivating Meaning, Purpose, and Spirituality in Midlife*

In *Aging Faithfully: The Holy Invitation of Growing Older*, Alice Fryling takes the reader on a journey from a frank look at the losses that accompany aging to hope and purpose in our later years. The processing questions at the end of each chapter will be valuable to anyone as they anticipate or experience the losses and joys of those years.

JOE BERNARDY, director of Navigators Encore

I have been waiting for such a book as this because even as our bodies age, our desire for a life with meaning and connections does not. Fryling invites us to embrace all the wonder and possibilities of each day in communion with our changing bodies. With wit and grace wedded to unadorned realities, Fryling spiritually guides us to the gift of growing old in and with Christ. She closes the book with spiritual wisdom for finding peace in uselessness, loneliness, brokenness, and our last season, and I found myself weeping. This book touches the soul for those of us who want to flourish and not wither till our final breath is given up. Thank you, Alice, for your faithfulness.

MARYKATE MORSE, author, executive dean of Portland Seminary

Aging Faithfully provides a road map for trusting and growing in Christ through the changing seasons of

our lives. Alice Fryling encourages her readers through Scripture, stories, and personal anecdotes. She provides dedicated space for reflection and meditation where readers can record their own thoughts in response to her writing prompts. It is a beautiful book; I recommend it.

SHIRLEY V. HOOGSTRA, JD, president of Council for
Christian Colleges & Universities

You know you're reading an excellent book when you have your highlighter out, marking numerous passages for further reflection, while at the same time jotting down names of friends who will benefit as well. *Aging Faithfully* is just such a resource. With tempered wisdom, empathy, and the navigational skills of a seasoned spiritual director, Alice Fryling takes us through the liminal space that is the aging process, helping readers reframe elderhood as a new stage to anticipate growth and fruitfulness.

MAGGIE WALLEM ROWE, author of *This Life We Share*

Wow. After reading the book, I began to realize, for the first time, that aging is part of God's plan for me. As I embrace that, I see that there are treasures, invitations, and blessings ahead that I did not expect.

MICHAEL A. WHITNEY, senior pastor of First Baptist Church,
Freeport, Maine

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The Holy Invitation of Growing Older

ALICE FRYLING

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Foreword

WHEN ALICE FRYLING asked if I might write the foreword for this book, my immediate reaction was: yes, of course! I have admired and appreciated her writings and wisdom across the years, and I knew others felt the same and would surely profit from *Aging Faithfully*.

Then, as I began to read, I realized that I needed to read this book for myself, and not just to write a foreword. I needed it for my own soul!

I am old enough to track with the challenges that come with aging. I don't need to be convinced they are real. I am moving near to the time when I will turn over the leadership of our mentoring ministry to our son, Kevin, and his colleagues. So I understand very

personally what Alice writes about the anxiety that comes with losses and letting go.

The need to understand how aging is part of God's good plan is likewise very real to me. And the core message of this book is just that: God has a purpose in and for our aging. That purpose has to do with the hidden life of the Spirit so that, as the body grows older, our spirit may grow deeper and stronger. Our ongoing calling, in later years as in earlier years, is to die daily, perhaps even hourly, with our Lord, and to realize (especially in our later years) the reality and power of his death and of his resurrection.

This is a hard but crucial message to learn, and I appreciate how honestly Alice lets us know how she and her husband, Bob, keep learning.

As I prepared to write this foreword, I called Alice at her home in Colorado to ask what she hoped would speak to her readers, based on her own experience. She hesitated a moment, then said, "At my age, I want to be helpful and do more, but I just don't have the physical energy to do all I used to do and still want to do."

And then she added simply, "I need to trust that while there may be less of me, there will be more of Christ."

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Around the same time, I asked my wife, Jeanie, to read the chapter on loss to get a taste for the book. When she finished reading, she looked up and said, “She’s writing about me!” It is my hope and prayer that you, dear reader, and many others will also read and say, “She’s writing about me—and she helps!”

Leighton Ford
founding president, Leighton Ford Ministries
Charlotte, North Carolina

Introduction

I HAVE CELEBRATED a lot of birthdays. Some of them were memorable. Some not so much. But long gone are the beautiful little-girl birthday cakes from my father's restaurant. Long gone are the party games in the backyard. I don't remember the names of my friends who came to the parties, but I do remember (heaven forbid!) the watermelon-seed-spitting contests we held. In those days, I thought I would forever love watermelon slices with big seeds and roses made of cake icing. It never occurred to me that I would change.

But I did change. Every year, I got older. I grew up from a little girl in a party dress to a young woman in

professional clothes. Then, without even realizing what was happening, I became a middle-aged woman. I was married and had children. I supervised playdates, went to parent-teacher conferences, and navigated a calendar full of activities, my own and my children's. Before I saw it coming, I was sixty. When I turned sixty, my friends assured me that "Sixty is the new forty." I did not need to worry. I could still live as though I were forty. But deep inside, I knew that wasn't true. When I was forty, I had children at home, a husband at work, a smaller waistline, and more energy. When I turned sixty, my children had left home, my husband was thinking of retiring, and my life began to look very different. I began to ask, *Who in the world am I now? Who do I want to be?*

Looking back, I can see who I was as a little girl. I recognize myself as a wife, a mother, and a professional person. I know my Enneagram space and my Myers-Briggs letters. But I do not know who I am (or who I will be) as an older person. This is a little scary. I like knowing who I am. I do *not* like not knowing the future. Like the ancient sailors with their antique (and inaccurate) maps, I do not know where I am going.

So I set out to try to learn from others what the

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terrain looks like. I began to check out books about aging from the library. I talked with friends and friends of friends. The advice I heard from books and friends was confusing. Some people told me all would be well. After all, they could still play tennis. Since I didn't play tennis when I was forty, let alone sixty, that didn't help. Others told me not to worry. They could still tie their own shoes at ninety. I hope I can do that, but I also hope for much more. Apparently, all of us experience the aging process differently, in light of our own life experiences.

Complicating things further was my sense that the aging process looks different at different ages. In our fifties, "old age" seems theoretical, something to deal with when the time comes. In our sixties, we begin noticing physical changes and experiencing losses in life that, for many, become wake-up calls on the journey to old age. For some, this reminds us that we need to begin to prepare for the journey of aging. For others, these changes and losses become places of resistance and denial. Rather than "giving in," some people do all they can to look young, act young, or convince others that they are young.

By the time we reach our seventies, the evidence of aging is usually more obvious. Our bodies and

our energy levels begin to shout, “Would you please slow down?!” We may respond, “I can’t!” Or, perhaps we shout back, “I don’t want to!” By our eighties, my friends tell me, we no longer have the option to ignore what our bodies are saying to us.

Whatever our decade of life, we are never not aging. Our senior years usually include reflections of events that happened in small or large doses throughout our life. Now, in our senior years, we have the responsibility (or opportunity) to practice all that we have learned. But I needed help to learn how to do this. I needed someone to tell me more about how to experience my senior years in life-giving ways.

And so I began to look for perspectives that would help me embrace this mysterious human experience as a spiritual process. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi wrote that “if we viewed elderhood as the crowning achievement of our lives, we would open the door with reverence and anticipation. Prayerfully, we would say, ‘Oh my soul, you are growing something special and good inside me. How can I give it the proper sunshine and nourishment to ensure that it grows to health and vigor?’”¹ This perspective spoke to the longing of my heart as I looked for guidance in my new season of life. I

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longed to understand the uniqueness, the complexities, the needs, and the potential of my soul as I moved into old age.

I decided to make a list of questions many of us have about the spiritual dimension of aging. My preliminary list includes:

- Will aging change who we are?
- Will aging diminish us?
- How will aging change our relationships with family and friends?
- How will aging change our relationship with God?
- How will we respond to our aging bodies?
- What do we do about the things we do not like in this experience?
- Is there anything we do like about getting old?

In short, how can we prepare for this unknown, uniquely personal experience? In particular, what happens in our souls as we age?

On the wall of my study are some ancient maps. They are, notably, incomplete, much like the map for the rest of our lives. What if we set out, like so many of the explorers, and find a new land that wasn't supposed to

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be there? Perhaps, by God's grace, we will discover something good we never expected. Perhaps, by God's grace, it will be a land where we can continue to grow. I am coming to believe that old age will indeed be a place where I can experience God's love in ever deepening ways.

Thank you for joining me on the journey!



I

A DIFFERENT KIND OF RETIREMENT

WHEN MY HUSBAND RETIRED a few years ago, I pictured myself sitting in the Howdy Doody Peanut Gallery, watching as the events unfolded. (Yes, I grew up watching *Howdy Doody*—on our black-and-white television.) Now I watched from the Gallery as Bob went through the difficult discernment process about the timing of his retirement. Then I watched as he grieved the loss of daily contact with colleagues and the personal validation that his job responsibilities gave to him. I watched him throw away the notes from hundreds of talks he would never give again. I watched as he faced his fear that the only excitement in the future might be on the

golf course. The view from my Peanut Gallery was not Howdy Doody happy.

But I thought I didn't need to worry about retirement for myself. Because I had no regular job to retire from, I told myself that I was not retiring. I was a mother, an author, and a spiritual director—all jobs that would change as I aged but not through traditional retirement. I thought I was all set to go.

Only I wasn't. All of us, as we age, retire. We retire not just from jobs but from relationships, ways of thinking, and how we think about ourselves. We move on. We no longer find validation in activities and tasks that have been important to us for decades. We can no longer do the things we used to do. The next generation is doing those things better than we can. To become older, then, means we retire, whether we're getting paid for our work or not.

Retirement, whatever form it takes, is often our first step through the door with a sign above it: "Old Age Straight Ahead." If we notice the sign, we may cringe. We probably think we can handle retirement. But old age? Most of us don't even like the term, let alone what it means for us. Who put that sign there, and what does it mean?

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For some, the step through the door is a defined moment: the transition away from employment, learning to live in the empty nest, an unexpected illness, the death of a parent, or the loss of a spouse. Others of us recognize the door only as we look back. We realize that gradual losses have built up in recent years, family dynamics have changed, and we are not getting as many calls for professional input. Whether the step through the door is clear or not, it is always a step into liminal space.

STEPPING INTO MYSTERY

“Liminal space” is the unknown place between where we are and where we will be. It is a place that is mysterious, vague, exciting, and scary, all wrapped up into something new and unformed. It is moving to where we have never been before.

The Old Testament book of Exodus describes the Israelites in liminal space as they left their familiar, if stressful, life in Egypt to follow Moses into a new land. Never mind that God said this was “a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). The Israelites responded as most of us do when we enter an unknown season of life. When they ran into

trouble, they complained, whined, and resisted: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?” (Exodus 14:11). As we move from the familiar stresses of midlife to the unknown stresses of the aging process we, too, may object, resist, and complain. God might lead us by a long, circuitous route, as he did the Israelites. Perhaps, by God’s grace, we might come to a promised land. But first, we need to go through liminal space.

And we all respond differently to walking into that liminal space. My friend George is a high-energy person. His first question in retirement was, *Now what exciting things can I do?* Other friends are paralyzed by retirement. What will I do now? Who am I now that I do not have a job description? Where is my family now that I need them? These questions do not have quick or easy answers, especially if we are looking for answers that have a spiritual perspective.

BLOSSOMING TREES

As my husband and I entered retirement and our senior years, one of the places we found perspective was in looking at the flowering pear tree outside Bob’s study window. It had always been the last tree in the yard to

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shed its leaves in the fall, but the year he retired, the leaves stayed on the tree until February. As we looked at the tree, we wondered if those leaves were a symbol of all the dead leaves Bob was trying to release in his own life. When the leaves finally fell off the tree and the branches were bare, Bob's soul also felt bare. Then, in the spring, the tree blossomed. It was beautiful. When the blossoms were replaced with green leaves, the tree became a symbol of hope for both of us. We saw the glory of God in the rebirth of our pear tree. David, the Old Testament writer of many of the Psalms, made a similar observation about God's glory manifested all around us:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

PSALM 19:1-4, NRSV

It was as though God was revealing something to us through our pear tree. Without the benefit of words, the Holy Spirit seemed to remind us that it was time to shed the past and wait for the green leaves of the future.

Our pear tree, then, gave a hint of how God might help us navigate this liminal space—through an image. In fact, God often uses images to explain truths to us. Sometimes we can understand unseen truths from things we can actually see. The Psalms made use of poetic images. The Old Testament prophets made use of instructive images. Jesus, the Master Storyteller, used analogies to describe how God works. The Kingdom of God, Jesus said in his parables, is like a farmer sowing seeds (Matthew 13:24-30), like a woman who finds a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and like a pearl buried in a field (Matthew 13:45-46).

GREEN AND FULL OF SAP

One of the Psalms describes, with an image, what our old age might look like. The psalmist observed,

The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

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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.

PSALM 92:12-14, NRSV

The first time I read that description of old age I was young, and I laughed! Old people are saps indeed.

But there is another definition of sap—the one the psalmist meant. Sap is a fluid that gives the plant life and energy. God invites us to flourish in our senior years, knowing that we are still producing sap, and that this sap will still produce fruit in our lives, for the sake of others. As we grow into the senior season of life, we will be called on to make choices about how to nourish the trees that we are becoming. To keep the sap running, we will be invited to “choose life.”

When the Israelites entered the last part of their journey out of Egypt (and into liminal space), God said to them through Moses, “I have set before you life and death. . . . Now choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). As I age, some days it feels easier than others to choose God’s life-giving ways. Some days, I am content with the changes that aging brings. Other days, I complain

and resist. On the more difficult days, I remember something else God said through Moses: “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. . . . No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deuteronomy 30:11, 14). In other words, I can do this. I can be the older person God has designed me to be. His Word will guide me. His Word is in my mouth and my heart. This is comforting and reassuring. New life in old age is not beyond our reach. God’s Word lives in us and will guide us each day for the rest of our lives.

But learning to choose life means that I have much to *unlearn*. I have lived with many perspectives about life and myself that are simply not life-giving. I want to unlearn my compulsive belief that I need to earn God’s love. I want to unlearn my belief that I am responsible to meet everyone’s needs. I hope someday to unlearn my persistent belief that I must impress God, myself, or other people with who I am and what I do. I want to unlearn the value I place on productivity, busyness, and constant activity.

Unlearning these things is countercultural and counterintuitive. Yesterday someone greeted me with

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“Hi, Alice! You keeping busy?” (How in the world do I answer THAT?!) This morning as I read our church newsletter, I was sad because there were so many activities I can no longer do. Things I used to engage in regularly no longer look the same to me. They are either too late in the night or too early in the morning. *Or, perhaps,* I mused to myself, *I just no longer want to do all those things.*

Listen! the Spirit whispers, *Perhaps God is creating something new in you to help you be green and full of sap even in your old age.* Perhaps I am changing. Perhaps God is freeing me from attitudes that have enslaved me in the past. When I complain that I run out of energy before I run out of day, I sense God smiling at me and whispering in the Holy Spirit’s silent way, *Don’t worry. It’s okay. I love you even when you can’t do all you used to do. I understand that and I will keep reminding you of my love.*

FRUITFULNESS OR PRODUCTIVITY

Another thing the Spirit reminds me, in the process of choosing life as I grow older, is that in this season, I can celebrate being more fruitful, even as I become less productive. Up until now, I have validated my life by

the tasks I get done and the accomplishments I achieve. In other words, for better or for worse, I have focused on my productivity. Now, God is inviting me to focus more on fruitfulness in my life.

There is a difference between productivity and fruitfulness. Productivity results from all the tasks I accomplish. Fruitfulness comes from within and includes nontangible ways I relate to others. I needed to be productive earlier in life as I worked hard in many ways to care for my family. The problem wasn't that I was being productive but my compulsive need to be "perfectly productive," preferably on my carefully worked-out time schedule. Now that I am invited to focus more on fruitfulness, my attitude is changing. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). We do not make these things happen in our lives; God does. And it takes a long time. Being fruitful is more out of our control than being productive. As we age, we may find that we are not able to do as many tasks, but by the grace of God, we may find that there is more fruit in our lives than ever before.

I am thankful for the people who shared their fruitfulness with me when I was young. I think of my

grandma, who paid attention to me and welcomed me into a place of love (a place that smelled like chocolate-chip cookies). I think of my Sunday-school teacher, who taught me that God loved me (and gave me prizes for memorizing Scripture verses). I think of the woman who led me in Bible studies in my college dorm room. And I think of my first supervisor when I entered campus ministry, who listened to me for hours over coffee and ice cream. I realize now that many of these people were not as “old” as I thought they were at the time, but as they listened to me and loved me, I experienced God’s love, God’s patience, his kindness, and his goodness. These “older” people did not rush on to the next item on their agenda. Their focused attention enriched my life. And now I find myself thinking of them, as God is inviting me to be more fruitful at a time when I cannot be as productive as I used to be. I hope that as I age, I will become more and more like those people who loved the younger me.

This shift from productivity to fruitfulness is liminal space for me. But it does not escape my notice that my adolescent granddaughter is also in liminal space. For her, it is the space between childhood and adulthood. For me, it is the space between the productivity

of midlife and my unknown senior years. My granddaughter and I are going through liminal space together. From my vantage point, the relationship I have with my granddaughter is more fruitful than productive. I am more invested in loving her, listening to her, and supporting her than I am in teaching her all I know and that I want her to learn. I hope I see her through the eyes of our heavenly Father.

Fruitfulness is a slow and mysterious process. I cannot do the many things I might have done in years past, but by the grace of God, I have the mental and emotional capacity to love my granddaughter in ways I couldn't have in my busy, driven younger years. Some of the leaves on my tree have died but the sap is still running, the tree is still fruitful, and I am grateful.

SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

Another image that encourages me as I live out the retirement years is the image of wine. When Jesus miraculously turned water into wine at the wedding feast, the steward at the wedding commented to the bridegroom, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10, NRSV).

Using this as a metaphor for the aging process, I might say, “I thought you gave me the best gifts when I was young and able to use them well. I thought you would save the inferior gifts for when I am old and slow and nobody cares.” Perhaps Jesus would answer me, “I have saved the best for the end of the party.”

Wine is a good image for old age because wine comes from fermented fruit. Fermentation is the process by which grapes transform into wine. The science of fermentation is called “zymology.” Spiritually speaking, it is not too far-fetched to say that as we age, God is performing a zymological act to ferment us into new wine. It takes a long time for grapes to ferment into wine. Perhaps that is why God saves the best wine for the end of our lives. We need time to ferment.

My friends who are wine connoisseurs describe wine by its flavor, the kind of wood barrel where it was fermented, and the meals it should be served with. I often laugh at the descriptions of the wines on a dinner menu. I don't know what they are talking about! But I do know that we need to pay attention to the wine of our own lives. What is fermenting in our lives? What are the fruits—not the accomplishments—that we can focus on now? What

foods (activities) will “pair” well with our lives in this season? Like experienced wine tasters, we can begin noticing whatever God is creating in us and for us in this season of our lives.

NEW WINESKINS

On another occasion, Jesus used a different image of wine to describe our spiritual journey. In a discussion about fasting with his disciples, Jesus said, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins. . . . New wine must be poured into new wineskins” (Luke 5:37-38). Commentators tell us that Jesus was referring to how wineskins (made from animal skins) stretched with use. If new wine was poured into old skins, it might expand as it continued fermenting, and the skins could break.¹

This image, too, can be applied to the process of aging. As God graciously continues to ferment the fruits of the Spirit in our lives into new wine, he pours this wine into the wineskins of our souls. Our bodies may become old as we age, but the wineskins of our souls need to continually be made new. If our wineskins are old, they may not be able to hold the new wine. It is significant that Jesus taught about the importance of

new wineskins when he was responding to questions about the rules for fasting. The Pharisees were used to a life of obeying the law and wanted to know what the rules were. Jesus wanted to describe new wineskins, full of grace and love.

Many of us arrive at the door of old age with a lot of rules, which have become laws for ourselves and for others. Our old wineskins probably have held a lot of these laws. Some of these rules are self-made. Some we have been taught. Most of our rules look very good. But Jesus came to replace a legalistic perspective with grace. As we age, God creates new wineskins in our souls to contain our new attitudes toward life. We may find that we are able to hold life more loosely. The things we thought were so important seem less so. When we grow older, we may (hopefully) become more flexible and less rigid toward ourselves and toward others. Our new wineskins become places in our souls to contain the transformations God offers us as we age. As we receive these new wineskins for our well-fermented wine, we will grow in our capacity to love others well.

The images of trees and wine God gives in Scripture give glimpses of how different our retirement years

might be. They invite us to look for new life in the ongoing changes age brings. As we let go of youthful perspectives we have outgrown, we become people who are like finely aged wine—wine that we will enjoy and that we will give to others.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe your current season of life? If you have retired, how has that experience been for you? If you are not retired, what changes do you anticipate retirement will bring? If you do not plan to retire, how will that be for you?
2. What image do you like best to describe where you are in the process of aging: leaves falling off a tree; a tree blossoming again; vintage wine; old or new wineskins? What does this image reveal to you about the aging process? What does this image reveal to you about your own responses to aging?
3. How do you respond to the descriptions of life as productive or fruitful? How do these descriptions contradict each other, and how do they complement each other? Which description is more accurate for your own life now?

A DIFFERENT KIND OF RETIREMENT



A PERSONAL MEDITATION: A DIFFERENT KIND OF RETIREMENT

Spend some time in God's presence with these questions. There are no right or wrong, good or bad, answers. Take whatever time you need to muse about your thoughts and feelings as you answer the questions that capture your attention.

1. Look out the window. If you can see a tree, spend some time noticing the way the tree reflects your experience as you age. If there is not a tree out your window, look for something else that reminds you of the aging process. Spend some time talking with God about how you feel about getting older.
2. Look at the apostle Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Which fruits would you particularly like to be present in your life in your senior years?

AGING FAITHFULLY

- In what relationships would these fruits be most likely to show up? How would this be different for you from the way you lived in your younger years?
 - Which parts of your life seem to be providing fruit-producing “sap” to you and others as you age?
3. How do you feel about the possibility that God may be saving the best wine for last in your life? Why might that sound like good news or bad news?
- What activities and relationships “pair” well with your life now? Who seems to be asking you for your wine? How do you feel about offering your new wine?