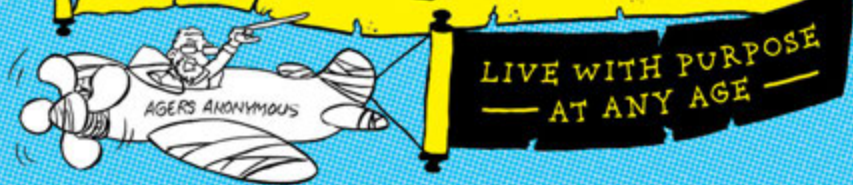


If You're
**NOT
DEAD,**

You're Not Done



FOREWORD BY CEC MURPHEY

JAMES N. WATKINS

CARTOONS BY JONNY HAWKINS

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

I planned to read *If You're Not Dead, You're Not Done* after my nap, but it put me to sleep again. No, wait, that was another book. I loved this one, and so will you.

JERRY B. JENKINS, bestselling biographer and novelist

An owner's manual for my vintage heart, soul, and mind—with plenty of Watkins humor to keep me up past 8:30.

BILL MYERS, bestselling author of *Eli*

Watkins tackles all of the aging issues, fears, and doubts. I highly recommend his biblically based hope and humor for backaches, arthritis, heartburn, or loneliness. It will make you feel young again!

LENORA WORTH, bestselling author of *Seeking Refuge*

A smart, funny, quick read; simple without being simplistic, deep without being difficult. A great gift for anyone of “that age.”

LISSA HALLS JOHNSON, bestselling author and ghostwriter for celebrities

James Watkins offers up a full-meal deal with supersized helpings of encouragement, hope, and an inspiring and compelling challenge to make a difference. Deliciously stuffed with milk-out-the-nose laughs.

RHONDA RHEA, award-winning humorist and TV personality

Jim shares witty wisdom based on God's timeless principles as revealed in the Bible. We who are "over the hill" are headed for the mountaintop, and that's something to celebrate! A must-read for anyone who suspects they might be aging.

RACHAEL PHILIPPS, award-winning humor columnist

A humorous guide to staying young while growing old.
Brilliant!

DAVID L. WINTERS, author of *Exercising Your Faith*

The book's encouraging Scriptures, helpful quotations, godly wisdom, and laugh-out-loud hilarity helped me believe that I could remain a fun person as I aged—even if I buy Tums by the bucket.

JEANETTE LEVELLIE, *Guideposts* writer and author of *The Heart of Humor*



If You're Not Dead, You're Not Done

LIVE WITH PURPOSE AT ANY AGE

JAMES N. WATKINS



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To my one-hundred-year-young aunt,
Mildred Watkins Cooper.
You inspired this book!



CONTENTS


Foreword by Cec Murphey xi

Introduction 1

Part I: Acceptance 5

1. Agers Anonymous 7
2. To Avoid Aging, Die Young 11
3. I'm Not Napping, I'm Recharging 15
4. Beauty Is but Skin-Deep, Ugly to the Bone 19
5. Grin and Bare It 23
6. "One" Is Not the Loneliest Number 27
7. Good Grief 31
8. Fifty Shades of Gray Hair 35

Part II. Anticipation 39

9. Putting the Boom Back in "Baby Boomer" 41
 10. I Want to Die Very Young at a Very Old Age 45
 11. Over the Hill . . . Onto the Mountaintop 49
 12. Acid Reflux and Fire in the Belly 53
 13. A Body to Die For 57
- 



Part III. Courage 61

14. Fear Is Inevitable; Worry Is Optional 63
15. Don't Get Older, Get Bolder 67
16. To Be or Not to Be, That Is the Question 71

Part IV. Curiosity 75

17. Curiosity Kills Only Cats 77
18. Bored to Death 81

Part V. Faith, Hope & Love 85

19. Everyone Needs a Faith-Lift 87
20. A Hope and a Future 91
21. Laughter Is the Best Over-the-Counter
Medicine 95
22. Love Is the Fountain of Youth 99
23. Loving Yourself as Your Neighbor 103

Part VI. Forgiveness 107

24. Love Your Enemies—It Will Freak Them
Out 109
25. I'm a Mess. You're a Mess. That's Why We
Have a Messiah! 113

Part VII. Gratitude 117

26. Crab Apples Are Not a Fruit of the Spirit 119
 27. I'm Eight Pill Bottles Old 123
 28. Fifty Reasons to Give Thanks 127
- 

Part VIII. Joy 131

- 29. When Your Only Joy Is Under the Sink **133**
- 30. My Inner Child Needs Out to Play **137**
- 31. Praise the Lord and Pass the Prozac **141**

Part IX. Optimism 145

- 32. On Jupiter, I'm Just Five Years Old **147**
- 33. You're No Longer a Spring Chicken,
but You Are a Wise Old Owl **151**
- 34. That's Good—That's Bad **155**
- 35. Pain Is God's Megaphone **159**
- 36. All's Not Lost with Alzheimer's **163**

Part X. Significance 167

- 37. No Expiration Date **169**
- 38. No Loitering! **173**
- 39. When You Can't Do a Blessed Thing **177**
- 40. You Will Leave a Hole—and
Not Just in the Ground **181**

Acknowledgments **185**

Notes **187**

Two Who Aren't Done Yet **193**

Other Books by

James N. Watkins **194**



FOREWORD

As I approached my eighty-fifth birthday, I told several friends, “It’s time to retire.”

They laughed. Even those who were long retired.

But I knew. I’d lost my enthusiasm, and my work no longer excited me. I began asking God, “What should I do with the rest of my life?” I didn’t want to just fill time; I wanted to enjoy myself with meaningful and helpful challenges.

I’d already served as a missionary, a pastor, and a professional ghostwriter; I had traveled to six continents and written more than one hundred books; and I wasn’t concerned about running out of money before I died. What was there for an old guy like me to do so I could feel useful and not just take up space on earth?

For one year I heard no answer. Then two things happened in answer to that persistent prayer. First, I volunteered to serve Communion as an ordained minister every month to shut-ins. I stepped up because I saw a need and no one else was doing it.

Second, a literary agent asked me, unsolicited, if I would mentor one of her clients. He had a fine book idea but couldn't write well enough for publication. For five months, I worked diligently with him, mostly by email. He worked hard and wrote his book, and the agent sold it.

Although it was a joyful experience, I didn't anticipate doing that again. And yet, only a few months later, a book editor asked me if I would mentor two people she felt showed promise. I agreed and marveled at their commitment and progress. That experience opened me to accept other want-to-be-published writers. That number has now grown to five, which seems enough.

I cite both examples because they enabled me to learn invaluable lessons about myself—concepts I hadn't thought of before. While engaged in those two ministries, I realized *they needed me*. I supplied something for them they couldn't do themselves. And they, in turn, gave me something. *Fulfillment. A sense of purpose.*

I hadn't realized that serving others would change *me*. I was serving others and that was reward enough. Or so I assumed.

One of my first insights was that helping wasn't something I did out of the goodness of my heart; I acknowledged that each act of kindness became part of my "repaying" God for giving me the gift of life. Meeting others' needs provided opportunities to confirm to God my gratitude for being alive.

My most simple—but profound—insight came more recently. I realized something new about myself. *I need to be needed.* Truly, I hadn't thought of that before. In responding to the needs of others, I was also responding to Cec Murphey's needs.

Since gaining that insight, every morning as I pray for the shut-ins and my protégé writers by name, I feel blessed by God. *I'm needed.* I'm an instrument in God's hands. By his grace, I can help others improve their lives, and the big payoff is that I experience greater fulfillment.

Giving has also become a powerful step in loving and caring for myself. For me to face my need was liberating, and it filled my heart with joy.

I'm still alive, healthy, and enjoying my life. I marvel that I can bless others, and what they don't know is that I'm the greater recipient of grace.

So if you're not dead, you're not done with life and God's not finished with you.

As you read my friend's book, I trust you'll find hope and humor for your aging adventure.

Cecil ("Cec") Murphey

Coauthor of the *New York Times* bestsellers

90 Minutes in Heaven and

Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story



Old Forks Home

INTRODUCTION

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18, NIV

Hi, I'm Jim. Welcome to Agers Anonymous.

This is my brand-new support group, and I am so glad you've taken time out of your busy schedule to join me. I'm honored.

With ten thousand of us turning sixty-five each day, there's definitely a need for this group and these ten steps. (Yes, I know, most *anonymous* groups have twelve steps, but I can barely remember the three words the doctor has me recall during my annual checkup. (Actually, the three words for the cognitive test were *dog*, *book*, and *grass*, but don't ask me what I had for breakfast!)

So, I'll be sharing ten characteristics that I believe are essential for being . . .

A Sainly, Satisfied, and Significant Senior

My basic premise is that aging is all in our heads: hair loss, diminished sight, decreased hearing, missing teeth as well as the addition of chin and ear hair! And yet, those are only what the apostle Paul calls “outward” signs. Most important is what is happening “inwardly” and not simply the side effects of our many orbits around the sun. We all know *young* octogenarians and some really *old* thirtysomethings. The difference is on what we choose to “fix our eyes.”

A Tale of Two Seniors

Let me introduce you to my aunt Mildred, one hundred, a founding member of Agers Anonymous, and my friend Karl, eighty-two. (To avoid a lawsuit, that’s not Karl’s real name.)

Mildred lights up whatever room she enters with a mischievous smile that warns you her mind is still sharp and she’s ready to deliver snarky one-liners. Years ago, when she was a stay-at-home mom, she volunteered as a teacher’s aide, staying on even after her own three daughters retired from teaching. She finally gave up the classroom at ninety years old when she became legally blind. And although she can’t see the board, she loves games and has us all laughing whenever we get together for game night.

I asked her the secret to her delightful demeanor. “Well, every morning, I get myself out of bed and force myself to

do things. But by 7 p.m., I'm exhausted, so I just lie in bed and thank God for all my blessings."

Karl retired from factory work at sixty-five, but had been active in building his own house, teaching Sunday school, and serving as lay leader in his church. He also did volunteer work, building ramps and remodeling living space for people with physical limitations. He enjoyed having his grandchildren spend a week with him in the summer.

But as Karl's physical health declined, so did his mental health. Now, living in an assisted-living facility, he had stopped going to the dining room, and eventually ate his meals alone in his room. Karl's one source of joy was receiving his church's prayer list and praying through it fervently. But even that took second place to obsessing about his health. He often called me with graphic details of his bowel movements and prostate issues.

Whenever I visited I would tell him, "If you wake up, God has something meaningful for you to do that day. If you're not dead, you're not done."

You're Not Done

That's the premise of this book of encouraging Scriptures and inspiring quotations, as well as practical ways to make a difference, no matter what your physical or mental limitations.

Despite how we may be wasting away, we are not done. And not to brag, but I've had four surgeries in three hospitals

in just two months, battled cancer and debilitating radiation treatments, broken a few bones, am legally blind in my left eye, have arthritis that makes turning my neck sound like the snap-crackle-pop of a bowl of Rice Krispies, struggle with clinical depression, and . . . uh . . . oh yeah . . . struggle with memory issues. So I'm not insensitive to what you may be facing.

But I believe God wants to renew us spiritually and empower us so we may “still bear fruit in old age, [and] stay fresh and green” (Psalm 92:14, NIV). I love it! We can be old and gnarled like an ancient vine, but still be full of life and producing lush, green leaves and wine-worthy grapes.

We don't have to turn bitter like short-story author and playwright Dorothy Park apparently became in old age: “Don't feel bad when I die; I've been dead a long time.”¹

So join me in the journey of being old, yet still alive and being renewed day by day. Aging really is all in your head. Your thinking and attitudes will determine your age much more accurately than the number of candles on your birthday cake. Spend your time meditating on those things that are unseen and eternal, and incorporating the ten characteristics of Agers Anonymous into your daily living.

At my age . . . I get my daily paper, look at the obituaries page, and if I'm not there, I carry on as usual.

PATRICK MOORE



PART I

ACCEPTANCE

We admitted we were powerless
over aches and pains, weaknesses,
memory issues, and all the other
consequences of aging that
had become unmanageable.

*I am certain that God,
who began the good work within you,
will continue his work until it is finally finished
on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:6



Methuselah and his offspring

AGERS ANONYMOUS

*I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair
is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you.*

I will carry you along and save you.

ISAIAH 46:4

As I wrote earlier, with ten thousand men and women turning sixty-five each day, I believe there's a need for "Agers Anonymous." Welcome to our first meeting! Here are my ten steps that I believe are essential in being a satisfied, significant, and saintly senior:

1. **Acceptance** of aches, pains, and all the other unmanageable consequences of aging

I remember the day in great detail. A warm, sunny day in July, slight breeze from the north and a stainless-steel propane grill that our son needed moved from the second-story deck to the patio beneath it.

"Hey, Dad, can you help me move this grill?"

"Sure."

Mustering up my machismo, I grabbed one end and . . . nothing. I strained every muscle as Paul easily lifted the other end. I tried again and again . . . nothing. And the final blow . . . his petite wife grabbed my end and easily helped him carry the grill down the stairs.

I vividly remember a desire to run and hide and have a good cry. I was old . . . and weak. My son's childhood hero had met his kryptonite!

So the very first step for all of us is to bravely confront reality that the traumatic changes of aging affect us—physically, mentally, socially, and even spiritually. Only then can we live fully one day at a time in the remaining steps:

2. **Anticipation** of a brighter future as we live fully in the present
3. **Courage** to face each new day without fear
4. **Curiosity** to keep exploring this amazing world and stay young by learning new things
5. **Faith, hope, and love** from Bible study, prayer, and fellowship with God and others
6. **Forgiveness** by making amends with anyone we have a grudge against or have called “an old goat”
7. **Gratitude** for God's love and care, replacing all our wrong attitudes toward aging

8. **Joy** through asking God to swap our complaints with things that help us experience *his* joy
9. **Optimism** by deliberately choosing positive thoughts based on God's "good, pleasing and perfect will"²
10. **Significance** realized by being energized with God's power and living out these ten steps daily

Thanks again for coming to the meeting.

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
the courage to change the things I can;
and the willingness not to whine about them.*

To Do

Choose one step to work on this week.
Continue working on a new step each week.
Visit agersanonymous.com for regular
postings of hope and humor on aging.



**"Well, first, let me give you
the good news."**

TO AVOID AGING, DIE YOUNG

*My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.*

PSALM 73:26

The odometer on my 1952 Model Watkins just turned over to sixty-nine!

It shows a lot of wear and tear: balding tires, dented fenders, and a bit of body corrosion—not to mention issues with clogged fuel lines, high engine pressure, and some major body work (four trips to three repair shops in just two months in 1991) plus, in 2008, forty-two days up on the rack at an auto specialist to give this rattletrap new life.

Theories of why we fall apart fall into two parts: wear and tear and planned obsolescence.

Wear and Tear

Our cells busily reproduce themselves throughout our lifetime. During all this multiplying and dividing of protein, our DNA (genetic blueprint) occasionally makes a mistake. Scientists

speculate that exposure to toxins, chemicals, and ultraviolet light breaks, twists, or scrambles these genetic codes. Cells begin to break down and our bodies begin to show signs of aging: loss of muscle strength and lung capacity as well as decreasing heart and kidney effectiveness.

Another cause of wear and tear may be blood sugar called glucose. High levels can cause protein cells to stick together into a gooey mess, clouding our eyes, clogging arteries, gumming up kidney functions, and making breathing difficult.

Not only do we get sticky and gooey, we also rust with age! Oxygen and “free radicals” allegedly cause protein to “rust” much the same way rain and snow cause a car to fall apart. Scientists believe these molecular muggers can cause arthritis, diabetes, hardening of the arteries, heart and kidney failure, lung disease, and cancer.³

Planned Obsolescence

Vehicles and humans begin to self-destruct once the warranty expires. Life spans have been remarkably consistent since Moses wrote, “Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty” (Psalm 90:10). Today in North America, men can expect to live until 76, women to 81 years.⁴

Researchers claim that the longest possible lifetime is between 115 and 120. But that’s no new discovery either. After incredibly long life spans prior to the Flood, God declared, “My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for

they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years” (Genesis 6:3). Sure enough, “Moses was 120 years old when he died” (Deuteronomy 34:7).

Increasing Your Years

We can increase our life expectancy with all the usual remedies: eat right, exercise, don't smoke or use illegal drugs. But despite all that, physical life is still terminal. Admit it.

But here's the good news—finally!

“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV).

Our spirit will live forever! As our physical bodies deteriorate, God is enlivening our spiritual being day by day. You're not getting older, you're getting better!

I intend to live forever. So far, so good.

STEVEN WRIGHT

To Do

Do something today to improve your physical or spiritual life.
(Consult your doctor before attempting mixed martial arts, ultramarathons, or running with the bulls.)