

**Counseling the Elderly:**  
**Walking through the Losses of Aging Toward Glorifying God**

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## Abstract

Title: How to Counsel the Elderly: Walking through the Losses of Aging  
Toward Glorifying God.  
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Ask our elderly in the Church about the process of aging, most will say it is a loss of health, energy, companions, physical mobility, and finally independence. Where do Christians turn when calamity comes? Where is their primary and ultimate hope? Do they think of God and His Word, along with their church first, or do they rely solely on medical professionals and blog sites? What about the societal myths of aging? Do they see themselves being green and full of sap in their last stage of life (Ps. 92:12-14) or do they follow the lie, to be old is to be sick? Throughout this paper, I intend to answer these questions in addition to how to apply the sufficiency of Scripture to the aging process.

The Bible has no shortage of references to one's death and what eternal adjustments can be made now. For example, Solomon instructs how one ought to view a funeral (Eccl. 7:1–6). The world considers funerals and death morbid, but the wise man is learning in the house of mourning (v. 4). He takes stock of his life, realizing a good reputation is honored and recalled in death. Godly wisdom is learned through challenging times rather than happy times. The former may not be desirable, but they are profitable. Reflective counseling questions, during pain and suffering, could be posed regarding how the counselee wishes to be recalled at their memorial. Do they think they will be recalled primarily as a great family man who loved playing bridge, or will others remember how the counselee lived for Christ, loving family and serving others as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25)? Beginning with the end in mind connects the counselee's "today" to "that day" when they go to be with the Lord.

The population of those 65 and older is expected to increase from 54.1M in 2019 to 90M by 2060. So, I propose now is the time to offer specialized training in counseling the elderly. The research of articles, books, conference lectures along with elderly surveys, and interviews for this project have humbled me. Before this paper, I was not prepared to address the spiritual losses ahead, but God's Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing joints and marrow, soul and spirit. Specialized training will enable the right Scripture to be selected, so the thoughts and intentions of the heart can be exposed tenderly, compassionately, and with surgical precision. All counsel and counselee change are to the glory of God.

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## I. Introduction

### A. Purpose Statement

1. The growth of the elderly population is projected to nearly double from 54.1 million in 2019 to 90 million by 2060, so there is an urgent need to show pastors and biblical counselors how to navigate from the intricate labyrinth of the antiaging secular remedies to hope in the gospel. Why is this important? Working in church ministry in estate planning for six years, I repeatedly witnessed survey results showing that 68 percent of adults live as though death was not certain.<sup>1</sup> They refuse to talk of death because death would be hastened. Yet Solomon reminds us that a funeral can teach how to live one's remaining days (Eccles. 7:1–5 [ESV]). With this wisdom, I will prove the thesis that if we numbered our days to what the mortality tables say, which is not God's decreed will but an illustration, we can prioritize our remaining days with the same belief as Paul, which is "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Ps. 90:12; Phil. 1:21).
2. This brings opportunities and challenges to churches like Compass Bible Church, Aliso Viejo, CA, as it administers biblical counseling to both church members and the neighboring community. Although the members of the church are redeemed, their knowledge of the theology of aging is sparse. Once they turn sixty-five, they are frantically researching Medicare with an insurance agent and consulting with financial planners. Physically, as body

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<sup>1</sup> Reid Kress Weisbord and David Horton, "68% Of Americans Do Not Have a Will," The Conversation, Last modified August 19, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/68-of-americans-do-not-have-a-will-137686>.

parts break down, they are busy making trips to the doctor. When trouble upon trouble comes, to whom or what will they turn for spiritual counsel? Will it be the compassion and soul care of a biblical counselor or the internet and well-intentioned friends with their favorite remedy?

3. The maze of antiaging secular remedies can range from the simple to the complex. The simple include diet, home health surveillance, and interactive TV. The complex include genetics, hormonal imbalance, cognitive neuroscience, and psychology to name a few. The corresponding solutions at worst offer no hope and at best temporarily alleviate the problem.
4. By the end of this outline, biblical counselors will have a path out of the dense brush of secular remedies and into the truth and grace of Christ. I will disprove secular empiricism and maintain the sufficiency of Scripture. The path out of this thicket will include a biblical anthropology contrasting the unbiblical anthropology of aging and end with the reason Paul can say “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Those are easy words to say, but believing it in your heart is something else. Thus, biblical counselors must show empathy and compassion for the elderly as our precious elderly courageously turn to God alone (Isa. 45:22).
5. The way out of the thicket is not without complications. There are myths about the aging process.
  - a) One of these myths is that older adults are perceived by others as less productive in later life. Yet these same older Christians are looking for ways to be productive after leaving the labor market. Some understand

that retiring is not biblical. However, they are vulnerable to the myth of living longer or being invincible by adding secular remedies.

- b) Another complication is the unbiblical anthropology of the science of aging. Neuroscientists such as Dr. Levitin treat man as if he has no soul. His mechanism describes the body's response to the stress of loss through the release of cortisol that affects immune function. The solution is to laugh your way to a better life, so that the mood-enhancing hormones, serotonin and dopamine, will be released. This makes the immune system stronger and prolongs life.<sup>2</sup>
- c) Another unproven view has to do with the theory related to antioxidants and chemical-free radicals. This leads to lipid, protein, and DNA issues that can cause disease. The concept of chemical imbalance is being accepted as a myth by research and medical professionals because there is no way to scientifically prove either chemical balance or imbalance.

- 6. Dr. Bob Smith addresses the slow and gradual decay that starts after age thirty and accelerates after age seventy.<sup>3</sup> His article concludes with preparing for the day of aging rather than reacting to it. He says that counselors should know and effectively use the principles that God gives us to grow old. Exercise and stewardship of the body are encouraged, but his caution is that counselors must guide the elderly away from useless and harmful medication and toward

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *Successful Aging* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2020), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Bob Smith, "Aging and the Physical Body," ed. Jay E. Adams, *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 6, no. 4 (1983): 4.

God's true solution. "The fear of the Lord prolongs life" (Prov. 10:27). My concern is that medications and other tools mask the idols of the heart. The counselee may feel better, but the problems and unbiblical responses are still there.

7. Among the elderly, prayer requests and conversations often lead to dwelling on aches, pains, and chronic diseases. Though these discussions are to be counseled compassionately (2 Cor. 1:4), we redirect their focus from the worship of their health toward the hope of spiritual growth in the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16). Brad Bigney, an author and pastor says that idolatry changes how you see yourself, and Paul Tripp, an author and speaker, calls those who value idols like their body over God, identity amnesiacs.<sup>4</sup>
8. The solution rests in God's promises and character. God promises that he will not allow the difficulties of illness to exceed the ability of the counselee to manage them (1 Cor. 10:13). Rather than the counselee losing self-control and becoming hopeless in this life, the counselor focuses the counselee on God, who will provide the grace we need if we are without doubt and asking in our heart in faith (Dan. 2:21; 2 Cor. 12:9; Mark 11:22–25).
9. So it is possible to flourish under affliction, as author Rhett Dodson says, "if one embraces suffering and loss as an opportunity to commune with Christ and grow in likeness to Him. If we are to flourish by faith, then it must be a faith that believes God is there, even when it feels like He isn't."<sup>5</sup> But this is

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<sup>4</sup> Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Rhett Dodson, *Growing in Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2020), 22.

only a small glimpse of hope of the eternal inheritance that we have in Christ

10. How can the elderly look forward to their eternal future in heaven if they do not know it? Ivor Powell, a pastor and writer from Wales, wondered at the age of 83 what he knew about the house of God. He was shocked that he did not know much, but he put his mind and all his direction into learning. Let us not wait until we are eighty years old to understand what *gain* means from a biblical point of view as we live on Earth. Part of one's counseling plan ought to include meetings discussing suffering and death as a necessary transition from Earth to heaven unless Jesus Christ returns first.

#### B. Intended Audience and Scope

1. The audience is biblical counselors and pastors.
2. The scope of this work will cover counseling themes associated with the soul and body, how believers can continue to grow in grace during the losses in older years, and the possibilities of serving in ministry even with mobility issues.

#### C. Research Methodology

1. The authority and sufficiency of Scripture will guide my methodology. Multiple means will be used to gather information. Publications in both academic and non-academic literature will be used. To verify or disprove what I am researching in print, interviews will be conducted of church pastors, small group leaders, and elderly individuals.

## II. Defining the Problem

### A. Temporal Versus Eternal Adjustments

1. In a survey of palliative care nurses, the most common thoughts about dying among hospice patients include a series of regrets. Hospice patients wish they took better care of themselves. They lament on relational conflict and bemoan missed opportunities for travel. They wish they had accomplished more in their career. These laments and regrets are sprinkled with feelings of gratitude. The common themes between these thoughts are the desire to love oneself more and that life is a series of gains (Eccles. 1:3).
2. The secular world forgets that man's life is like the grass that withers (Isa. 40:8). All the toil to do good works at volunteer organizations for good "karma" is like building a sandcastle on a beach only to have it destroyed by high tide. Taking supplements and reading books to live longer ignore the sinful nature of man caused by the fall of Adam (Gen. 3). Many do not understand that life is a gift from God, not a series of gains to acquire on Earth.
3. What many recognize is how fragile life is when a tragedy occurs. God uses the death of friends and loved ones for the unbelievers to hear the hope of the gospel from an evangelical pastor speaking at a memorial. He also uses sickness and the uncertainties of life as a reminder that we are not in control. After tragedy strikes, there is a religious fervor.
  - a) Examples of this fervor are anxious families attending church temporarily and reading books on what the afterlife may hold. Tim

Challies noted years ago that ten books on heaven tourism broke Christian publishing records. These tourism books were about people who entered heaven as sinners and left heaven as sinners.<sup>6</sup> The heaven tourists, who are seeking comfort from suffering, have their hope in the delusion of another sinner's unbiblical experience.

- b) Why do secular people flock to heaven tourism books and churches after tragedy and suffering? Victor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived three years in a Nazi death camp, said that man is changing his pursuit of happiness to look for meaning in his suffering.
  - c) Pastors and counselors observe that after time heals the deep cuts of pain and despair, man forgets the meaning in his suffering and his need for the sovereign God. He passes from the quest for meaning to the quest for happiness.
4. The significance of these statements is that older Christians need to discern any information promoting an extended lifespan, feeling better, or reinventing heaven. They have to understand the reality of suffering and death by making the necessary adjustments in their sanctification now.

## B. Myths of Aging Influencing the Church

1. If we examine the myths of aging that are influencing the church, they break down into three fields of influence: the "norms" of society, exaggerations of health, and intellectual lies. The societal myth says that the elderly are not productive. It is best to leave them alone because they are uninteresting and

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Challies, "The Bit of Heaven the Heaven Tourism Books Never Touched," *Challies* (blog), September 17, 2018.

have little desire to be involved with individuals in other age groups. While this may be true for a minority of older people, most want intergenerational contact. Grandparents treasure the time they devote to their children and grandchildren. However, for most churches, intentional, intergenerational action is absent.

2. The common health myth is that older people are physically weak, so being old is being sick. This may be true for people over the age of eighty-five, but Howard Eyrich notes that most of the elderly are healthy.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, many of those in their sixties have an attitude that conforms to this myth that being old means being ill. The secular world's observations from psychiatrists such as Becca Levy are that "people with positive views of old age had lower blood pressure, less stress, better physical balance, and were more likely to develop healthy habits and get regular medical care."<sup>8</sup> This truthful observation agrees well with Solomon's observations that trusting in the Lord and not leaning on your own understanding will be healing to one's flesh and refreshment to their bones (Prov. 3:5, 8).
3. The intellectual lie is that the learning capacity of older people is diminished. Eyrich notes that researchers do agree that older adults learn slower, but they are more effective at learning due to their years of wisdom.

### C. Unbiblical Anthropology

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<sup>7</sup> Howard Eyrich, *The Art of Aging: Preparing and Caring* (Hoover, AL: Growth Advantage Communications, 2018), Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkie W. Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *Aging with Wisdom and Grace* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2019), 11.

1. The integrationist and secular anthropologies reside in the understanding of man as a trichotomist or monist, respectively.
  - a) The monist position is that we consist of the body alone and that desires, feelings, thoughts, and emotions flow out of the brain. These components can affect the brain.
  - b) Trichotomy separates the soul from the spirit, giving it three parts: the body, the soul, and the mind. The trichotomous purpose of seeking a soul/spirit distinction has established the relevance of psychology in Christian counseling. By saying that thoughts and feelings reside in the soul, separated from the spirit, they advocate an external technique of managing human emotions.
  - c) The biblical view is that man is created in two aspects, which are an immaterial part, or soul, and a material part, or body (Eccles. 12:7; Matt. 10:28). This concept of the dichotomous view of mankind starts in Genesis 2, where man is formed from the dust of the ground (body) and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (soul).
2. As mentioned before, the viewpoint of the monist is seen by neuroscientists such as Dr. Levitin. He treats man as if he has no soul. Techniques to manage the emotions of the outer man (like laughing) can slow down aging.<sup>9</sup> Besides outer-man emotion management techniques, the secular remedies of supplements and other tools are intended to control the body's cellular

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *Successful Aging* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2020).

process. For seniors experiencing depression, medications such as SSRIs are often prescribed so that the patient experiences a calming effect.

3. Tim Keller, author and pastor, illuminates the United States' hedonistic culture in its desire to eliminate suffering by contrasting the US's desire with four other views: moralistic, self-transcendent, fatalistic, and dualistic.<sup>10</sup> Each view has a cause for suffering and a resolution. For example, the cause of suffering in the moralistic view is wrongdoing. The answer is to do good so that you may find everlasting happiness.

- a) The doctrine of karma is the purest form of the moralistic view.<sup>11</sup> In the United States, 31 percent of respondents in a survey by Statista very strongly believe in karma.<sup>12</sup> Karma's answer to the purpose of man is that you pay for your wrongs, then your soul is released into the divine bliss of eternity after you atone for your sins. Once you are in eternal bliss, you escape the endless cycle of reincarnation.

- b) Different than karma, Christians believe that suffering is often unjust and unfair (Ps. 37:1–2). But Christians also know that life on Earth is a point in comparison with the infinite continuum of eternity. Thus, they depend on the grace of Christ, for his power is perfected in the suffering of the old (2 Cor. 12:9). They also have an unshakeable faith

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2013), 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Statista survey, United States: How strongly do you believe in the concept of karma, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/959368/belief-in-karma-in-the-us/>.

that the effects of Adam’s sin, (cancer), will be used for their conformity to Christ and God’s glory (Rom. 8:28–29).

- c) Meanwhile in the US, we have medicalized suffering and sorrow. According to the monist perspective of man, there is no spiritual component to suffering in the US. One of the primary origins of this perspective is Dr. Robert Spitzer, a psychiatrist who headed the task force that wrote *DSM-III* in 1980. At one time, Spitzer was regarded by his psychiatrist colleagues as a “godfather” figure. However, Daniel Berger quotes some of Dr. Spitzer’s peers, stating that he incorrectly characterized many normal experiences of grief and anxiety as mental disorders.<sup>13</sup> The result for our elderly today, inside and outside our church, is treatment of spiritual problems with medicines, pain management, and coping techniques. These tools offer temporary relief from grief, depression, and anxiety but ignore the inner-man war for control of the heart. However, growing in the grace of Christ, the elderly can ask God to transform them from thinking of a diagnosis of incurable illness as a medical event to seeing the incurable illness as a spiritual opportunity to glorify God.

#### D. The Church Losing Its Saltiness on Responses to the Aging Survey

1. In the “Introduction” and “Defining the Problem” sections, I made a claim and defined the problem. The claim is that there is a thicket of secular remedies

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Berger, *Mental Illness: The Necessity for Faith and Authority*, vol. 1, (Taylors, SC: Alethia International Press, 2016), 80.

that has grabbed the attention of our elderly. Next, I defined the problem as our elderly making more temporal adjustments than eternal adjustments.

Thirteen survey responses from thirteen elderly church members of Compass Bible Church supported the claim and the problem as defined. Looking closer at a summary of these responses, here is what was discovered.

2. Before trouble brews, Christians need to be prepared to turn to God and His Word as their priority. The survey asked, “Who will you turn to as trouble upon trouble mounts?” Most responses confirmed they are turning to the internet and medical and legal professionals. Only four of our saints are turning to God’s Word and prayer.
  
3. Second, I mentioned earlier how an unbiblical anthropology is focusing their attention solely on their bodies to the exclusion of using their suffering to become more like Christ and glorify God. I asked the question, “If they were describing the aging process in order to prepare a younger generation on aging, what would they say to them?” This question created a mixed bag of responses. Close to forty percent said they would tell the younger generation to take care of their bodies and minds. The other sixty percent emphasized strong faith followed by increased prayer. The forty percent who said to focus on their bodies and minds did not see God in their aging. No comments acknowledged that though their outer body decays, their inner man is growing (2 Cor. 4:16).

4. Finally, the thesis of this paper is that if we numbered our days to what the mortality tables say, which is not God's decreed will but an illustration, we can prioritize our remaining days using the same belief as Paul, which is "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Ps. 90:12; Phil. 1:21). To understand how they were numbering their days, they were asked, "What changes have you made to address the challenges of old age?" Understandably, the elderly's adjustments included preparing for their next move. Many of our elderly do not want to depend on others as they age, so they emphasized eating well, exercising, and keeping their minds active. Three individuals mentioned adjustments in their spiritual life like more prayer and study of God's Word.

### III. Research

#### A. Secular Vision of Aging

1. Some scientists believe that through technology they can extend lifespan and create a utopian condition. The term associated with this group is *transhumanist* because they believe in overcoming biological limitations. Their ideal vision is to extend human lifespan as they eradicate pain and suffering in the world. A transhumanist definition of antiaging is that by changing a human's physical state through technology such as genetic engineering, each human is autonomous to pursue the transformation of man to *posthuman transhumanism*.<sup>14</sup> One way of understanding the terms transhumanism and posthumanism is the gradual improvement of a human's sensory reception, emotional capacity, and cognitive capacity. Life

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<sup>14</sup> Fazale R. Rana, *Humans 2.0* (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2019)

expectancy is extended by these progressive advances. Many of the scientists in this movement are secular humanists who affirm agnosticism or atheism.

The goal is to make humans immortal, divine beings.

## B. Popular Secular Theories and Solutions

1. One leading theory is that DNA damage, or mutation to DNA sequences, occurs within an organism's genome. A genome is an organism's comprehensive set of genetic instructions. If the DNA sequence is a set of instructions that are organized into paragraphs (genes) and chapters (chromosomes), then the entire manual from start to finish would be the genome. Once the mutations in abnormal cells begin to outpace DNA repair and outnumber the normal cells, the start of disease can be traced from the cellular level to the affected tissue, skin, brain, or other organ. The mutations are irreversible because the original pattern to make a fresh copy is lost. This suggests that the risk of cancer increases exponentially as these mutations build up over time. There are researchers who believe that gradual loss in the efficacy of DNA repair is one of the major causative factors driving the aging process. The solution to these changes and cancer lies in precision medicine. Metformin, a drug used by diabetics, is one of these precision medicines. The hope is that by using precision medicine to study the cellular pathways controlling aging, drugs like metformin might reduce the risk of cancer and aging. Currently, scientists do not expect any scientific evidence from humans for another decade because their experiments are still being tested in the laboratory on model organisms.

2. Free radical aging theory says an accumulation of free radicals or reactive oxygen species may accumulate over time.<sup>15</sup> Accumulating these free radicals could damage DNA and RNA and cause cell death. If there is a chemical imbalance between antioxidants and free radicals favoring free radicals, disease will occur. But research shows that free radicals serve important functions and are not uniformly bad actors.<sup>16</sup> The free radical theory remains unsubstantiated.
3. Diets, such as those consisting of too many calories, influences aging. Susan Roberts, director of the energy metabolism laboratory at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, says cutting calories “is the only intervention that extends lifespan.”<sup>17</sup> Researchers admit that studying a calorie restriction diet is an enormously complicated topic. However, unproven claims on supplements such as resveratrol continue to be made. One example is from Harvard scientist David Sinclair, who believes resveratrol is “as close to a miracle molecule as you can find.”<sup>18</sup>

### C. Exegesis of Paul’s Exhortation

1. Background
  - a) The main point of the writing to the Philippians in AD 61 is to exhort them to keep pressing on toward the goal of being with Christ in

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Campiski, *From discoveries in ageing research to therapeutics for healthy ageing*, *Nature*, 571, (July 2019), 185

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Bonnie Liebman, *An Anti-Aging Diet*, *Nutrition Action Health Letter*, (May 2017), 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

heaven. In Philippi, they are exhorted to advance the gospel in a spirit of unity with peace and joy in the Lord.

- b) Besides thanking the Philippians for their generosity (Phil. 4:10–26), Paul's purpose for writing was to report about the success of advancing the gospel in his imprisonment (vv. 12–14). He also is communicating his trial, and the end was in sight (vv. 19–26). The Philippian church's situation was not any better. The anti-Semitic and anti-Christian Macedonians were persecuting the church, so Paul wanted to encourage them in their suffering for Christ (Phil. 1:29).
- c) The suffering from persecution was intensified with a conflict between two women church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche. Paul urged them to agree in the Lord so that church factions are prevented (Phil. 4:2).

## 2. Historical Context

- a) Paul's Second Missionary Journey
  - i. Traveling from Antioch to Neapolis, four missionaries (Luke, Timothy, Paul, and Silas) traveled to Philippi. They found along the river a group of women meeting at an unofficial place of worship on the Sabbath and Holy Days. After hearing the gospel, Lydia and her household were converted and baptized (Acts 16:15).
  - ii. Paul exorcised a divining spirit from a slave girl. The owners of this slave girl lost their source of income, so they incited the crowd to attack Paul by claiming that Paul and Silas favored

illegal customs. This caused the magistrates to flog and imprison them. While they were praying and singing in prison, an earthquake opened the prison door and released their shackles, but Paul remained. The jailer, obviously shaken by the earthquake and listening to Paul's prayers and hymns, asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The jailer and his household were saved (Acts 16:31–33).

iii. Demanding the rights of the Roman citizens, Paul asked the magistrate to release Silas and himself from prison. Roman citizens like Paul and Silas could turn to higher authorities for rights violated. The magistrates apologized and requested they leave Philippi. Paul, Silas, and Timothy left a promising new church. They left behind Luke in Philippi to groom this new church plant (Phil. 4:2).

### 3. Cultural Context

a) Why does Paul weigh the fact of living or dying (Phil. 1:21)? If the purpose is to be with Christ forever, why present a choice? Craig Keener writes, "Ancient speakers sometimes contemplated their options in front of their audiences. Philosophers often argued that death was simply annihilation (after which one would not regret it) or the soul moving to a different place."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Craig S. Keener and John H. Walton, eds., *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 2073–2074.

- b) The Philippian Christians lived within a culture that was deeply concerned with death. Death was an ongoing reality for Roman families. There was a high infant and child mortality rate with little protection. The bereavement period was normally seven days, except for the poor, where it was a day. The procession after the mourning was meticulous and consisted of a pig, which was sacrificed and eaten at the tomb.
- c) There were two seductive temptations to Roman culture. One was having the status of a privileged Roman citizen. It was easy to forget one's identity in Christ. The other allure was the self-righteous, morally excellent Stoic philosophy. This philosophy believed they could not restrain fate, so why worry? Stoics such as Cicero and Seneca advocated replacing painful thoughts with the contemplation of virtue. Cicero's list of virtues for contemplation is like Paul's list in Phil. 4:8."<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Literary Context

- a) In the body of Paul's letter of exhortation, Paul reveals his present circumstances and his future hope (Phil. 1:12–26). Within this disclosure, we learn that his imprisonment is causing a new direction for his ministry (vv. 12–20). Paul used the roadblock of imprisonment as a new prison ministry. The change in direction of ministry is an

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<sup>20</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 365.

expectation the wise counselor will present to the elderly using situational letters like Philippians. The motive for Paul's response is so that God may be glorified, whether by life or by death (v. 20).

- b) How can Paul be casual about death and bold about preaching Christ? He is heavenly-minded. Maarten Kuivenhoven would define Paul's heavenly-minded attitude as "the orientation of a believer's mind on the things of heaven and Christ for application in this earthly pilgrimage."<sup>21</sup> Beyond imitating Paul, Paul desires the Philippians to have the mind of Christ. The next section, Philippians 2:1–11, shows how the Philippians can become heavenly minded and become like Christ.

## 5. Grammar

- a) There are two infinitives, "to live" and "to die." The first infinitive is present ("to continue living") and the second is aorist ("to die").<sup>22</sup> By using the present infinitive, Paul is accentuating the process of living. There are various views of the completed action "to die," such as Paul seeing his coming martyrdom or anticipating his future state with Christ (v. 23).

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<sup>21</sup> Maarten Kuivenhoven, *Growing in Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2020), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 601.

- b) “For to me” is known as a dative of opinion. Author Daniel Wallace says, “It speaks of something that is true (or ought to be true) only with reference to the one whose identity is put in the dative.”<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Meaning

- a) Paul is giving the reason why he can take a personal view of glorifying God in his body, whether by life or death (v. 20). If Paul is living, then suffering under imprisonment will not alter his ministry of preaching Christ. It may change the direction of how and where he preaches, but his identity in union with Christ is not changed. Everything he depends on, thinks, and does is consumed in living for Christ. Yet Paul is facing a serious capital trial and possible martyrdom. If Paul dies, then rejoicing in Christ’s presence is far better than the afflictions, sufferings, and beatings in the tough task of preaching the gospel (Phil. 1:17–29, 3:10; 2 Cor. 11:23–27).

## IV. Biblical Considerations

### A. The Sufficiency of Scripture and Hope in the Resurrection

1. Two major theological and biblical considerations stand out. First, the sufficiency and authority of God’s Word will address the unbiblical anthropology of the secular community. Second, hope in God and in Christ’s resurrection will carry Christians through the process of aging and dying well. These two considerations will answer how the elderly can make eternal adjustments in their perspective of aging and death.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 146.

2. Before I review the body-soul interdependence, it is worthwhile to understand why contrasting a biblical and an unbiblical anthropology is important. First, the secular aging theories do not acknowledge God, so they ignore that man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Consequently, they ignore the fall of man through Adam's sin (Gen. 3). And they reject man's redemption through Christ. As Piper describes, they ignore the aim of all history and his purposes "as the fullest display of the greatness of the glory of God's grace in the slaughter of his Son."<sup>24</sup>

The goal of man's redemption is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) and become like Christ in our moral character. At Christ's return, God's plan is for complete restoration of God's image realized in the person of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

- a) One of the most important facts for the elderly to recall is that the body and the soul perform their operations as a whole person, not separate parts.
- b) For example, this might appear with a counselee believing their disease is causing them to worry and be anxious. Instead, bodily disease from the outer person can sometimes expose sin such as anxiousness already rooted in a person's heart. The scriptural view is that the body and soul work together. The soul starts thoughts, feelings, and emotions and is the initiator of moral actions.
- c) The body carries out whatever the soul sends it and is the mediator of

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<sup>24</sup> John Piper, "The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 84.

moral action. For example, the body through bodily instincts of hunger and thirst gives the soul a desire for food and drink. Elijah had been through a physically and spiritually challenging ordeal—literally running for his life. In his depression, he wanted to die, but God had other plans. God addressed Elijah’s physical needs: sleep, food, and drink (1 Kings 19:5–8). This shows that care for one’s body is important in the Scriptures yet secondary to attaining godliness (1 Tim. 4:8). Another consideration is the soul’s desire for food when the bodily functions have no hunger. This can lead to overeating.

- d) Contrary to secular scientists’ popular DNA damage theory, God says the cause of aging is the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). Even though God warned Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, otherwise he would die, Adam rebelled against God and ate from the tree (Gen. 2:17, 3:19). The penalty for Adam and Eve’s rebellion was death through a relatively slow aging process (Gen 5:5).<sup>25</sup>
- e) Living in a fallen world results in the reality of death because sin’s effects have not been removed. However, death is not a punishment for Christians. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1) because the wrath of God has been propitiated by Christ for Adam’s sin. The benefits of salvation like eternal life and taking on

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<sup>25</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 618.

new bodies will be applied to us over time.<sup>26</sup>

d) Until death, man will experience pain and suffering. There are many causes of suffering from its effects such as God's discipline (Heb. 12:5–8) of a Christian, the result of living in a fallen world (Rom. 8:22), and the cost of following Christ (John 15:18–20). No matter what the cause, God uses the pain and the suffering for two reasons: that we may become more like Christ (Rom. 8:29) and that we may be faithful unto death when we receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Compare this to the moralistic perspective of suffering (see p. 10). The cause of suffering is not sin; it is an individual's wrongdoing. The resolution is not that we become more like Christ and faithful unto death but that we attain happiness. After surveying how to respond to suffering from various sources,<sup>27</sup> Sweeting's discussion is most relevant to the biblical counselor. I will give an example of this treatment in session four of the counseling plan.

2. A second major consideration is the church's view of aging and death. Aging is a process of incremental loss. It usually (not always) starts with the decay of one's body (2 Cor. 4:16), moves to a loss of friends and the companion of one's youth, and ends up with one's mobility diminishing, affecting their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 618.

<sup>27</sup> John Piper, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006); Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2013); R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010); Donald Sweeting and George Sweeting, *How to Finish the Christian Life: Following Jesus in the Second Half* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012).

purpose in life and independence to care for themselves. The secular perspective fights the aging process and ignores death. Meanwhile, the Bible has no shortage of references to one's death and what eternal adjustments can be made.

- a) For example, Solomon instructs how one ought to view a funeral (Eccl. 7:1–6). The world considers funerals and death morbid, but the wise man is learning in the house of mourning (v. 4). He takes stock of his life, realizing “a good reputation is honored and recalled in death, and godly wisdom is learned through difficult times rather than happy times (the former may not be desirable, but they are profitable).”<sup>28</sup>

Reflective questions could be posed regarding how the counselee wishes to be recalled at their memorial. Do they think they will be recalled primarily as a great family man who loved playing bridge, or will others remember how the counselee lived for Christ, loving family and serving others as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25)? Beginning with the end in mind connects the counselee's “today” to “that day” when they go to be with the Lord.

- b) The secular view of death is dread and terror (Heb 2:15) because the pain and suffering before death is most memorable. In Ecclesiastes 12:1–8, Solomon illustrates the phenomenology of aging through the decay of our bodies, from our trembling hands to failing vision and legs. A failing body leads to our last enemy, death, but there is good

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<sup>28</sup> Comment by Michael Chrzanowski.

news. Throughout the process of aging, we groan inwardly as the pain of aging awaits the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23), but we also rejoice in Christ's victory. The sting of death has been removed (1 Cor. 15:55). The meaning of this verse can be illustrated from a prayer retreat after I became a Christian. While I was praying with eyes closed on a nearby hiking trail, I looked down after fifteen minutes to find a coiled rattlesnake at my feet. Through God's providence, I ascended vertically several feet, escaping the sound of the rattle and the sting. As God's providence saved me from the sting of a snake, so the Christian, through Christ's resurrection, has escaped the dread and terror of death.

- c) Through the door of death opens an inheritance that is "untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time; it is compounded of immortality, purity, and beauty (1 Peter 1:4)."<sup>29</sup> The nature of this inheritance is a resurrected body that will be imperishable (1 Cor. 15:42). There will be no wearing down of our body described in Eccles. 12:1–8. Since the body is no longer subject to sin, counselees will maintain a youthful stature. The location of this inheritance will be in a new heaven with a new home (John 14:2–3) on a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). We will recognize (Matt. 17:1–4) and be reunited with our loved ones and have the privilege of meeting every

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<sup>29</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 86.

follower of Christ. There will be an excellent work as to the Lord without selfish motive (Col. 3:23). Work assigned in heaven will be commensurate with our faithfulness on earth as God’s steward (Matt. 25:23). After a day of fulfilling work to the glory of God, we will enjoy a meal with a loved one or fellowship with Moses. The best of all is well stated by Grudem: “More important by far than any of these will be the fact that we will be in the presence of God and enjoying unhindered fellowship with him. ‘Behold, *the dwelling place of God is with man*. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and *God himself will be with them as their God*. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ (Rev. 21:3–4)”<sup>30</sup>

- d) Like Paul, Christians have a hope that whether they live or die, they are in a win-win situation (Phil. 1:23). If they end up with the loss of mobility and independence, they press on toward the goal of an inheritance in Christ (Phil. 3:14). That does not mean they are living in isolation, minimizing fellowship, and awaiting their departure from earth. It does mean pursuing a new ministry such as being a witness for Christ no matter where God sends us, including an assisted-living facility. This serves as an example of a *life of service to Christ* to those inside and outside the nursing-care facility. It contrasts with what I heard (understandably) working on staff at a Christian assisted-living care facility. The residents’ common statement upon arriving was that

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<sup>30</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1430.

they never expected to be living in assisted care. Can you imagine Paul saying “I never imagined coming here” to the Roman guards before he started his prison ministry?

- e) Whether in prison or an assisted-care facility, God will bear, carry, and deliver our elderly saints (Isa. 46:4). Author John Oswalt’s metaphor is instructive in describing this verse. He says,

“Normally, we expect that as children reach maturity, they do not need to be carried any longer. Furthermore, there usually comes a time when the child must begin to carry the aged parent. This is where God transcends the imagery. There will never come a time when we outgrow our dependence on God. We are as dependent on God in old age as we were when we were infants (Ps. 71:9, 18).”<sup>31</sup>

- f) Psalm 71 is a beautiful psalm written by an older man who hopes continually in God (v. 14) during the good times and the calamities and troubles (v. 20). It is during those times of calamity that the psalmist and elderly’s natural response is to cry out “Please do not forsake me!” when their strength is spent in old age (v. 9). After the psalmist’s plea for help, his first response is that he will hope continually and praise God more. Four times he will proclaim God’s faithfulness and righteous acts. Why can he proclaim God’s righteous acts (vv. 15–18, 24)? He can recall from his youth how God has carried him faithfully into his old age (Isa. 46:4). This is his basis for calling God his refuge, rock of refuge, and his rock and fortress (Ps. 71:1–4). The implication for those of us counseling the elderly is when

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<sup>31</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 230.

the calamities of loss appear unbearable, have our elderly counselees recall God's mighty acts for their remembrance and as a witness to other generations (Ps. 145:4). Jay Adams speaks of this effect by saying, "If your counselees lie down and play dead, that's sin. Tell them to get up, run, walk, or crawl (if that's the best they can do), but at all costs keep moving toward the goal (Philippians 3:14). There is a great deal of difference between growing older and growing old!" Their physical functions may decline, but their inner man is growing (2 Cor. 4:16).<sup>32</sup>

## V. Biblical Plan

### A. Finishing the Race Strong by Walking in the Spirit

1. The long-term goal of this plan is for the counselee at the end of his life to be able to say as Paul did shortly before his death, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). The short-term goal is to see the counselee turn from the lies of this culture to the truth of Scripture so that they may walk in the Spirit, ready to endure whatever aging throws at them and leaving them to proclaim only one thing: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever" (Rom. 11:36).
2. Since aging is a broad presentation topic, I will create a scenario of a Christian believer named Tim who attends my church. He is a 65-year-old retiree

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<sup>32</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Wrinkled but Not Ruined: Counsel for the Elderly* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 24.

married to his high school sweetheart. He lives by the principle taught by his Christian financial planner: make sure you know how much wealth is enough before retiring. He lives by this financial plan so that he and his wife have all they need to play golf together, play bridge with friends, and visit the children and grandchildren in Italy. When friends ask him about retirement, he replies that he is “chilling out” after his employment was terminated. Recently Tim has developed a chronic pain that impairs his ability to travel. This unwelcome news has placed Tim’s life into a tailspin. He anxiously wonders what bad news is next. These two questions bring him to counseling: Is it true that to be old is to be sick? What else is going to happen?

3. There are three stages of affecting change from the worship of self-pleasure to the worship of God: (1) right foundation, (2) right theology, and (3) right thinking. Weekly journaling will be completed so that progress can be evaluated across all stages. Prayer will be constant before, during, and after each session. The overall strategy, tasks, goals, and outcomes are listed for the sessions.

#### B. Right Foundation, Session One

1. Right foundation session one is about building trust, building hope in God and his Son, and gathering data. Also, the presentation issue of anxiousness over loss of health, job, and friends will be addressed in session one homework.
2. Session one tasks will start with inspiring hope. Then the counselor will use data from the Personal Data Inventory to ask extensive and intensive questions.

3. The primary goal is for Tim to place his hope in God and in God's Word (Rom. 15:4). The secondary goal is to build trust between the counselor and Tim. Trust building means weeping with him over his losses (Rom. 12:15), being available for calls in between counseling sessions (Gal. 6:2), showing compassion for his losses (1 Thess. 5:14), expressing confidence in how God will work through him (Phil. 1:6), and praying for him (Phil. 1:3-5).
4. The counselor's desired outcomes are for Tim to commit to the completion of all assigned homework and for the counselor to inspire hope and build trust with Tim.
5. As homework, Tim will read Psalm 23 and meditate on what God is saying. This psalm speaks to the losses of aging and how God will carry us through these losses, which are called the valley of the shadow of death.<sup>33</sup> Second, Tim will circle all personal pronouns, noting the changes in pronoun use between verses 1–3 and verses 4–5. The counselor will ask Tim to identify one thing he can learn of David's relationship with God from the change of pronouns. Reading Proverbs 10:28; Romans 5:2–3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Romans 8:23–25; Colossians 1:4–5; and 2 Corinthians 4:16 will lead Tim to complete what hope produces for each verse. Finally, he will memorize Psalm 23:4 and create a prayer to God about desired changes in his heart. As he is completing the above assignments, he will journal about that for which he is hoping.

### C. Right Foundation, Sessions Two and Three

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<sup>33</sup> David Powlison, Aging, 2014, one hour conference workshop, CCEF website

1. Right foundation sessions two and three will verify that Tim understands the doctrine of salvation. The counselor will continue to address aging and its associated losses over time.
2. The tasks continue to give Tim more hope in the gospel. The counselor will continue data gathering, particularly to create a timeline of events with Tim's responses. This timeline is a part of Dr. Stuart Scott's Big Picture tool.<sup>34</sup> Because Tim is buying into the myths of aging, like to be old is to be sick, the focus will be on 2 Corinthians 4:16 from session one homework. The counselor will contrast Tim's self-sufficiency to walking with the Shepherd (Ps. 23).
3. The first goal is to show biblically how a long lifespan is a blessing from God. The second goal is for Tim to learn the purpose of loss (Rom. 8:29; Ps. 23:6) and how death is not a medical event. Instead, death is a door to go through to be with Christ.
4. One desired outcome is for Tim to believe that his decaying body is being transformed into the hope of a stronger inner man (2 Cor. 4:16). The other outcome is for the counselor to start discerning the true issue (John 9:18–23).
5. As homework, Tim will write his testimony first. Second, he will demystify the myths of our culture by reading Proverbs 20:29; Psalm 71; Job 12:12; Isaiah 46:4; and Ecclesiastes 12:1–8. For each verse, Tim will record what the world says about aging, what God says, and what Tim will do as a result. Third, from Ed Welch's *Motives* booklet, Tim will highlight ten significant

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<sup>34</sup> Big Picture is a tool to organize information provided by Dr. Stuart Scott.

statements so he can start identifying his motives. If Tim does not have a health care directive, power of attorney, and trust or will, the counselor will ask him to start considering these documents. He will memorize and meditate on Psalm 92:12–15 and journal with his wife each day about how both can “bear fruit in old age” and be “full of sap.”

#### D. Right Theology, Sessions Four and Five

1. Right theology will be the focus of sessions four and five and will cover the theology of suffering. Also, care will be taken to help Tim understand why he responds to changes of aging the way he does.
2. The tasks will focus first on the homework (Psalm 71) and how an elderly man with little strength cries out to God in complete dependency. Second, they will show our problem is not our physical losses (Eccles. 12:1–8). Our problem is our attitude toward those losses. Third, the counselor will review Tim’s ten underlines in the *Motives* booklet. Fourth, the Big Picture elements will be presented in a completed format. These elements will be mapped out for each loss. Here is an example:

- **Heat:** chronic pain
- **Presenting Problem:** What is going to go wrong with my health next?
- **God:** truth/hope/help for suffering such as Rom. 8:28–29 and 2 Cor. 4:16.
- **Thinking/Beliefs:** Retirement is about chilling out and enjoying life.
- **Renewed Thinking/Beliefs:** After Tim’s business career, he will see all good things like travel coming from God. All Tim pursues in retirement will be an act of worship to God. All Tim’s investments will be invested

for the glory of God.

- **Good Fruit/Strengths:** joy and peace

Lastly, confession and repentance will be discussed around the idols identified in the homework from the *Motives* booklet.

3. The goal is to give Tim hope in times of calamity (Psalm 71:14) by focusing on who God is (Ps. 71:1–4) and what God promises. The counselor will help him understand his dependency on the Shepherd to lead him out of the thicket so that he turns away from his idols and toward God by faith.
4. The first desired outcome is that Tim will understand that suffering is an essential part of the tapestry of the universe so that he may become more like Christ.<sup>35</sup> The second is that as Tim experiences God’s grace in his afflictions (2 Cor. 12:9), he will proclaim God’s mighty acts to his children and grandchildren (Ps. 145:4). The third is that Tim will comfort others as God has comforted him (2 Cor. 1:4). This will mean that at all costs he does not stop but keeps pressing toward the goal (Phil. 3:14).
5. As homework, Tim will learn of biblical resources to allocate at the onset of suffering and during suffering:
  - a) Days One and Two
    - i. Trust in God’s providence by meditating and journaling on Lam. 3:19–26. These verses will be read within the context of Lamentations 1–5. Tim will journal how his crucible of loss has purified his heart by making the Lord his portion over

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<sup>35</sup> John Piper, “The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 82.

worldly pursuits (v. 24).

b) Day Three

- i. Read Genesis 1–3 to process his suffering through the creation, fall, redemption, consummation story line. After reading Genesis 1–3, Tim will write a prayer of devotion and gratitude for God’s plan of redemption (Gen. 3:15).

c) Days Four and Five

- i. For Tim, there is a hope in an eternal inheritance of being with Christ forever. After reading the “God Promises” chapter from Randy Alcorn’s book *Heaven*,<sup>36</sup> Tim will make a list of what God is promising in one column and how dying is gain (Phil. 1:21) in the other column. Verses for special consideration regarding God’s promises will be John 11:25–26; Romans 6:23; and 1 Corinthians 15:43–44.

E. Right Thinking, Sessions Six and Seven

1. In the right-thinking part of the counseling process of sessions six and seven, we will evaluate his understanding of how he is processing suffering. The concept of replacing his “old man” behaviors—renewed in the spirit of the mind—with the “new man” will be explained (Eph. 4:22–24).
2. The first task will be to review his homework on how he processed suffering (days one through five). Then the counselor and Tim will discuss what is necessary for Tim to put off the old man and put on the new man.

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<sup>36</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Touchpoints: Heaven* (Sandy, OR: Eternal Perspective Ministries, 2008), 69.

3. The goal is for Tim to expect bodily decay and ask God to use that pain and suffering for good (Rom. 8:28–29) and in a way that glorifies God (Rom. 11:33).
4. The desired outcome is that Tim’s behaviors become less self-centered and more Christ-centered in times of suffering and pain. He will trust God and no longer be anxious about what is next regarding future illness.
5. As homework, first Tim will memorize and meditate on Philippians 1:21 and Psalm 90:12. Second, he will write his mission statement on how he believes God wants him to use his remaining years. Third, he will list Puritan Richard Baxter’s directions on what the Christian is to recall in the past, do in the present, and anticipate in the future from chapter 29 of the *Christian Directory*. This will help Tim with facing the fear of death.<sup>37</sup> Fourth, he will read Philippians 4:9 so that he has the right thinking, thanking God and praying to God the next time suffering arises.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Two key purposes defined in the proposal for this paper are how this project will help me personally and how this paper will help the Church of Christ know better how to minister to the aging.
  1. On the first purpose, I said in the proposal the following: “This project will broaden and deepen my understanding of what a biblical response to loss as a senior adult. It will take the seriousness of the world’s diagnoses and

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Baxter, Directions for the Aged (and Weak), *Christian Directory* (Ligonier, PA; Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1838), 519

implications and replace it with what Scripture says. My hope is to see anxiousness on health and other matters diminish more throughout this study.”

2. On helping the church of Christ, I will provide a biblical response to the secular treatment of aging. As I will illustrate, both purposes are in process of being accomplished thanks to the grace of God and His Word.

B. The research into this paper has proven God’s Word sufficient for all the spiritual troubles of aging.

1. I am encouraged by the Psalms, such as Psalm 71, affirming God has been carrying me throughout my years—from age forty-three when I came to know Christ to age sixty-five today. This truth recalls the reason we rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4). He is near! He is not only near, but he is our Shepherd, who will lead me and our elderly saints through the calamities of aging.
2. Through the thicket of losses from the aging process, there will be certainties and uncertainties. The certainties will be accelerating loss of health and income for most elderly older than eighty. Along with the loss of lifelong companions may come the loss of mobility and independence. The uncertainty is that no one knows when or how these events will unfold except God.

C. In California, we prepare for earthquakes and other disasters with an emergency kit of water and food supplies. The church’s emergency kit during times of loss is the biblical counselor, who can guide and minister by the Word of God.

1. So when the shadow of death descends upon the Christian, they turn from idols to the Shepherd. My initial survey results of our thirteen elderly church members show that we can all benefit from some biblical counsel. Also, I

have seen the change in my response to troubling health news from becoming the counselee throughout this paper.

2. Recently, an eye exam found what looked like a benign problem two years ago accelerate into a more serious condition. If I had received this latter news two years ago, my first step would have been to search the internet. The more I search, the more I need to know and demand to know. Control over my health misfortune becomes my idol.
3. Clinically, this eye exam diagnosis is misfortune, but this is not unexpected as noted earlier in Ecclesiastes 12:1–8. Now, I am equipped with Psalms 71 and 23. I am confident that I will be carried through this “valley of the shadow of death” by my relationship with Jesus Christ (Ps. 23).
4. I know God’s plan is for us is to be full of sap and green (Ps. 92:14). This means vision loss may take me to new and unexpected ministries where I can pray for others, and the Lord will help me so I can comfort and counsel others too (2 Cor. 1:4).

D. Will our church and its counselors be prepared to address the growth in elderly saints and associated aging losses? What can we do to prepare?

1. First, we need to encourage our elderly saints to practice asking for help from God and others. They need to know asking for help is not an indignity but a form of courage. Repeatedly, I read of the practical need for a handyman in survey responses. One friend at church, who is looking for his next ministry at age sixty-nine, has agreed to fulfill this ministry need immediately.

2. Next, get our elderly inspired to teach the younger generations about God's mighty acts in their life (Ps. 145:4). While working with our elderly at an assisted-living care facility, I was thrilled to witness the changes in their countenance from confusion to joy as they shared their written stories with their children and grandchildren. These stories can also be attached to their last will and testament as part of their spiritual legacy.
  3. Third, small-group leaders need to invest their time in getting to know the talents of our elderly so that they can support ideas for new ministry opportunities in our church and community. Regarding our community, I am proud of our churches using biblical counseling in outreach. There are significant evangelism opportunities for the gospel, especially here in southern California. However, this paper causes me to ask if our church has taken time to look at how we can effectively reach the elderly inside our church?
  4. Last, like we have gerontologists for elderly medical care, I wonder if it is worthwhile to train and equip biblical counselors with an understanding of how to counsel our elderly and their special needs. The church can promote this service through small groups and other areas where our elderly meet. Part of the promotion would let them know that before they turn to a medical expert, they can be guided by a biblical counselor through the thicket of secular remedies and into the grace of Christ.
- E. Like a teenager entering college, which will prepare them for adult life, so our elderly entering age sixty-five need to prepare for this last stage of their life. This preparation will help our elderly look at every loss as an opportunity to become like Christ and

glorify God. This is the time for our church to let our elderly know they have a better place to turn before trouble comes. They do not have to live the myth and lies of our culture. By numbering their days and running this race as Paul did, expending all for Christ, they will be able to say with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

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