

Growing Up Rising Above

Sometimes, the process of growing up seems like it will never end. When we are very young, it feels like the next birthday, playday, vacation, or outing will never come. Time forces us to wait when we are anxious for the next happy or exciting event to occur. We are so excited when we finally get to school, but graduation and possibly college seem so far away. When work and our new family begin, retirement is a faraway dream. Some people call retirement the Golden Years. A Christian may realize they are only the middle age years between growing up and eternity. Looking back, time seems as *"just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14). However, it is in the growing up years that we receive much advice.

We often receive more advice than we can digest. Parents want what is best for their children to give them a good, satisfying, and productive life. Others offer opinions on what to read, watch, and which job to prepare for. One hundred years ago, many people were advised to leave farming for the big cities and industries that offered secure jobs, high wages, and promised retirement. Sixty years later, those jobs changed to computer-driven robotics, and job security was gone, along with the retirement plans. Unfortunately, people's advice includes only what is known at the time, not upon the future, which only God knows. As James said, All of our planning should consider *"If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that"* (James 4:15).

Experience teaches us that most planning is poor because we do not know all the details. Weather forecasters come close, unable to identify all factors of wind, thermal currents, and the moisture content of approaching air. They are limited, just as we are, in forecasting where we will be in three, five, or ten years because no one knows for sure what tomorrow will bring. Some of our brethren live well into their 80's and 90's. Others' lives are cut short as early as their teens. Change is always a part of growing up, in life, and spirit. A faithful child of God, prepared by the gospel, is ready for changes in this world, even to death. Only God's plan will never change as He prepares us for the future with Him.

In contrast to the advice and plans of man, God's guidance is dependable and is available in scripture. It will not tell you which job or business to follow. It will not tell you which stocks to invest in for your retirement years. But it gives sound guidance to help you choose between right and wrong while growing up. Most important is *"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you"* (James 4:10). Solomon gives wise advice that requires our study. *"The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer"* (Proverbs 30:24-25). When taken with (Proverbs 6:6-8), we understand that we should work with what is available to us at the time. (Ecclesiastes 3) reminds us that *"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven."* Other passages teach us to stay awake and pay attention to the opportunities around us. Solomon illustrates the result of not observing and taking action, *"Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks"* (Ecclesiastes 10:18). Jesus told the disciples, *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?' Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest"* (John 4:35).

As people grow, they often develop bad habits. Jesus said to the disciples, *"unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3). Children are sinless and free from habits and selfish actions. As the "good shepherd," Jesus showed humility and service

to others. After washing His disciple's feet, He told them to do likewise (John 13:14). And Jesus quoted God's word through Moses as He said, *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:39).

Paul's letters to the brethren at Corinth and Philippi seem to advise them to discard the "bad habits" they have grown into, forget self, and serve others. Paul's comment, *"Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor"* (1 Corinthians 10:24), parallels Jesus teaching to serve others before self. To the church at Philippi, Paul says, *"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:5-8).

As we *"press on to maturity"* (Hebrews 6:1-2), let us study the scriptures, examine ourselves, and change to become more like Christ in knowledge, faith, love, and devotion to each other. Then together, spread His knowledge to those we contact daily, remembering that Jesus said, *"Yes, I am coming quickly"* (Revelation 22:20).