

LIVING, DYING & REBIRTH

Final Week of a 4-Week Series Inspired by the Eric Butterworth Book, "In the Flow of Life"

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Aging! We're going to talk about aging. So, how do you feel about aging? You know, what kind of things come into your mind when you think about getting older? Is it warm fuzzies? Or is it something that kind of scares you and concerns you and bothers you?

I think culturally, for the most part, there's evidence to show that we don't like aging. We resist aging. We hate it. We deny it. We even lie about it. We're lying about what our age really is because we don't want to be perceived as older in any way.

Aging is kind of hard, and I want to give you four reasons why it's so hard. But first, a friend of mine said, *"You know you're aging when most of your parts are no longer in their original starting position."* [Congregants laugh] That's how you know. All right.

So, the first one that makes it kind of hard is we start to lose our looks. You know, things like wrinkles and age spots and gray hair or no hair, sagging -- all these types of things -- bother us a great deal. Because in our culture, we get judged by our looks. I mean, so many things go well or don't go well based on our looks. And we spend a lot of money on all kinds of lifts and tucks and different things so we don't look older; so that we look young. We're still looking for the fountain of youth, because everybody wants to be forever young. Because young is praise; young is light. And old seems bad; old seems undesirable.

The second reason is because we begin to have some decline physically and mentally. We slow down. Things we used to do, we're no longer able to do. I've got friends who were great tennis players, racquetball players ... and now because of their knee issues and back issues, they are no longer allowed to play. The more serious things -- the ultimate one -- is that we're no longer able to drive, because we lose our sense of independence. Hearing and seeing -- all kinds of things begin to go south. So it makes that process of aging just not as much fun.

And certainly, we are seen as having less value as we get older. When we're no longer working, we're seen as unproductive, not capable, all kinds of negative things. You know, irrelevant. And we are devalued. And sometimes there are images like grumpy old men yelling at kids to get off the grass. I mean, we don't exactly have all the greatest images around that.

And the fourth one -- you know, the fourth reason is hard to deal with aging? Because it's a reminder we're getting closer to dying. And I'm kind of like Woody Allen who said, *"I'm not afraid of dying. It's just I don't want to be there when it happens."* [Congregants laugh]

There was a book I read many years ago called "The Five Regrets of the Dying." And what they found in that was the idea of dying was so scary that the person dying never shared it with the family, and the family never shared it with the person. Everybody said, *"Nope; you're going to be fine, Grandma. You're going to get better!"* Because nobody wanted to go to any deeper level of sharing that level of emotion.

And the reason she wrote the book is because she was the one -- the caregiver was the one -- where the family actually opened up about their fears and insecurities and questions about what it's like to die.

You know, all cultures do not share the similar aspect of devaluing and all these other things with regard to aging. You know, there are cultures where aging is respected; that seniors are honored. They're elders. They are sought out for advice. They are appreciated. They are acknowledged. And they're a natural part of the community -- a welcome, integrated part of the community. Like, both my parents ... In our culture, your parents stayed and lived with you until they died. Both my grandfathers stayed with us until they died. So, we just have some different cultural norms in different countries.

But the one thing I would say is that our current dominant attitude about the elderly I think is unfortunate, because already it leads to loneliness and isolation, depression, and feeling like they don't belong.

So, here's what Eric Butterworth ... and, by the way, this is the last of the series of "In the Flow of Life" by Eric Butterworth. And Butterworth says we should look beyond our physical age and negative view so that we can recognize the continuing unfolding of our spiritual power and our divine potential and the possibilities for learning and growing spiritually.

Every stage of life offers opportunities to become more understanding, loving, and spiritually aware. You know, we are still -- and will always be -- amazing spiritual beings. The kingdom of God will always be within us. We will always be the light of the world. But we need to look beyond some of the aspects of age that we so focus on, we create a negative experience and miss out on the depth of spiritual richness that we could be gaining.

Growing older does not mean we stop being spiritual. It does not mean that we are less who we are, less who we came here to be. Or that that journey or path has come to any kind of end. You know, every day offers an opportunity to deepen our spiritual connection and discover new meaning.

So, let's talk about three principles. And these aren't just related to aging ... but they are, but they're just good principles for living our lives.

And the first one is to **STOP RESISTING CHANGE**. Stop resisting life.

You know, someone said the hardest thing about getting old is to accept the fact we're getting old. And it shouldn't be something that should be something we don't want to talk about or scares us, because it is an aspect -- it really is an aspect -- of the spiritual journey of life.

So, one of the greatest sources of pain in life is not when things change or we lose things, but it is the resistance that we have towards the things that have happened. We have things in our lives that we think are wrong; they're bad; they're unfair; they should have never happened. We disagree. We wish it was something else.

And the truth: all of that energy we spend in resisting all the things in life -- including aging and getting old -- really causes us more pain than we realize. It causes us more frustration and moves us further away from the very things that we want -- of peace and joy and happiness.

And here's what he says. He says we want the relationship to return the way it was. We want our children to need us the way they once did. We want our bodies to have the strength that they had when we were 20 years old. We want the opportunities that we missed to come back. We want life to be different than it is. And we think, if everything just stayed the same, everything would be good. And the truth is: that's the worst thing. We think everything staying the same, being familiar, will be safe, predictable, and we like being in control. But that actually is not as safe, not as secure. And it actually leads to greater levels of frustration and unfulfillment.

You know, when we learn to release our attachment to how life should be, and our attachment to how it used to be that we want it to be again, then we will create room for understanding and greater possibilities.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says, *"To everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven."* And what that is saying is that everything changes. That is life. Life is change. And there is a season for everything, and we need to roll and flow and accept with the seasons and changes of life. Because that's always going to be there.

And our resisting and fighting and kicking and screaming is actually going to hurt us more than it's going to help us. We have to actually move with the flow of the different changes and seasons in our lives.

You know, Eric Butterworth says that acceptance and making peace with how life is right now is a huge step in not just managing aging, but managing life. And he says after we find peace with what's going on and find that acceptance, that the next thing is: we must trust that there is a Higher Intelligence and a higher process being worked through. That, if we let go, it will lead us to greater and better things, not kicking and screaming and fighting and resisting.

Acceptance is not surrendering our power. It is acknowledging where we are so that we can decide wisely what move we'll make next.

So, two practices to help us stop resisting change or just resisting life. And the first one is just to ask yourself and acknowledge: What in my life has changed? What in my life has been lost or is different? And then the second question that follows right on it: What am I resisting? What am I having trouble accepting in my life or about myself? And then the third one is, what am I afraid this change means to me and to my future?

And then the second one is this: to put two columns down and write down the things I can change and the things that I can't. And so, the economy, other people's opinions, and so on. And then attitude. We *can* change that. You know, choices; we can change that. What actions we take; we can change those.

And they really do a good job. They're simple little exercises, but they're about being honest about ourselves and it helps us to let go of the resistance and open ourselves to the acceptance, which brings us greater peace and a greater opportunity to handle whatever is before us.

Okay. And for me, stop resisting change is like saying stop making your life harder. I mean, for all of us. Stop resisting means stop making it so hard.

Okay, the second thing was his Chapter #8, and it's called **DON'T GROW OLD; GROW ONWARD**. Don't grow older, grow onward.

Here's what it says in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 46, Verse 4: *"And even to your old age, I am he. And even to your gray hairs, I will carry you."*

So, the chapter is to grow old or grow onward. And basically, that Scripture is saying God's Presence will not disappear, even if you have gray hair. Even whatever way you grow old, Spirit will always be there. You know that Scripture – *"It is in God that we live and move and have our very being"*? That will never not be anything but 100% true. As we are born, as we die, and every second in between, it is the truth!

You know, in our society, we truly do celebrate youth a heck of a lot more than we do age and getting older. Sometimes aging can be treated like some kind of failure or problem that can be treated or fixed, or something that we get embarrassed about.

But oldness does not mean that we are less valuable. You know, our bodies may change, but our capacity for wisdom can deepen. Our responsibilities can change, but our capacity to love and expand. Our careers may end, but the opportunities to serve do not have to end with them.

Spiritual growth, when you think about it, it's really a lifelong journey. You know, we could spend like 40 years in a career and still have lessons to learn. We can raise a family and still have relationships to nurture. We can have disappointments and still have the wisdom to gain. We could have lived through all kinds of changes, but there are still new ways to serve and experience life.

Growing onward means remaining teachable. No matter what we've all gone through, no matter how many years we've been great at these different skills, that we still have the opportunity to learn, to grow, to change, to move forward to greater possibilities for our lives.

So, Moses was a prince. He was a slave. He had all kinds of disappointment. And then at a very old age, he was there ... and remember the burning bush? Remember that God talked to Moses and he said, *"Moses, I want you to get my children out of Egypt."*

And you know what Moses said? He said, *"Are you talking to me?" [Congregants laugh]* See, people think that's Robert De Niro. It's not. It's Moses who actually... And then he was hemming and hawing. If you read, it's like he said, *"No! No! Don't send me! Don't send me! Send my brother, Aaron. He is much more articulate. I'm not really good with the spoken word."*

And so, he's hemming and hawing, and then God says another famous line, and that is, *"Moses, stop beating around the burning bush."* I'm not kidding. These things, I did a lot of research for you to find out these little-known secrets. Anyway ...

But the cool thing about that is that Moses shows in that whole story that, regardless how many years have gone on, no matter what you've done, there's always more to learn. There's always more of ourselves to awaken to. You know, there are other ways to be transformed and to minister and help other people in our lives.

And he gives an affirmation, and this is it: *"I am not finished growing. The divine life within me continues to express itself through wisdom, love, creativity, and service. I welcome the possibilities of this season."*

And then the last one is to **LIVE TODAY WITH PURPOSE**. Matthew 5:16: *"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

And so, accepting change is the important thing. Growing onward. And now it is to get clear; to live each day with purpose. To live each day with purpose. To ask yourself every day: What is my highest and best purpose today? What is the highest and best thing that I can do this day?

And today, maybe it's to be an instrument of peace. Maybe it's to be an instrument of kindness. Maybe today it's to be an instrument or a channel of encouragement or compassion or listening or helping others or expressing joy.

Sometimes purpose looks like just taking care of a family member. Sometimes it looks like listening to someone who is really struggling and just needs someone to listen. Sometimes it means mentoring a young person or volunteering in the community or creating something beautiful. Sometimes it means setting a healthy boundary or telling the truth to someone you love with kindness and asking for help when we need it.

You know, the size of the action does not determine the spiritual value and the benefit and the blessing that we can give and be to others. And so, the whole thing is to ask yourself every day: How do I live with purpose? What is the one thing I can embody and express? What is one thing that I could do to help someone?

So, I'm just going to read you now the five regrets from that book, *"The Top Five Regrets of the Dying."* And, as a way to see for ourselves; maybe there's something there that says, *"Ah, that should be my purpose. You know, that should be my purpose for today or this week."*

So, the first one is: I wish I had the courage to live the life that was true to myself and not the life that others expected of me. And so, if you were to live on purpose, how would that look for you? To be true to yourself? Today I will be true to myself.

And the second one: I wish I hadn't worked so hard. And maybe that's about finding balance. And maybe it's about slowing down and simplifying. I don't know what it is, but that might be a purpose that we would have.

The third one: I wish I had the courage to express my feelings. Sometimes we keep things bottled inside and we lose the opportunity for authentic connection and closeness and intimacy because we're afraid that we'll get rejected.

Fourth: I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends. You know they say that, over 60 years old that most people have three friends or less. As we get older, and people move away and things change, we don't

replenish. We don't put ourselves out there and stay in touch and connect with people. And it, again, creates isolation and pain for ourselves.

And the last one is: I wish that I had let myself be happier. Sometimes we're so busy working and worrying, chasing our goals and waiting till we get our goals, that we don't allow ourselves to be happy. What's that line? What was it? Eleanor Roosevelt, who said, *"Most people are as happy as they make up their minds to be."* And so, a question for all of us: How happy have we made up our mind to be today, or this week, or for our life?

A 70-year-old man walks into a country club with his beautiful 25-year-old wife. Everyone is staring at them. And then finally, there comes a time where he is with his buddies, and one of his buddies said, *"Hey, man, how did you get such a young, beautiful woman to marry you?"*

And the guy said, *"I lied. I lied about my age."*

And his friend said, *"Did you tell her you're 50?"*

And he said, no, *"I told her I was 90."* [Congregants laugh] All right.

You know, aging is a scary thing, but it can also be a beautiful thing. And I think when we put our intention and our attitude and our mindset to it being beneficial, and see it as a continuation of our spiritual process. It doesn't change the unfolding of the soul that God has called us here to be.

So, please remember to stop resisting change. Accept it, move with it, and it'll lift us to higher levels. You know, let us grow not older, but grow onward. And finally, let's live each day with purpose. And when we do, we will truly be living in the flow of life.

God bless you all!