

Flourishing in Old Age - HE Metropolitan Youssef

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Psalm 92

¹² The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³ Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
¹⁵ To declare that the Lord is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Alleluia

- King David is talking about the righteous person
- He compares him with a palm tree and the cedar (great trees that grow very high)
- "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord"
 - For a tree to bring forth fruit, it needs to be planted in good ground - and the good ground is the house of the Lord
 - Planted doesn't just mean "attends church" - but in the church life. Life of repentance, liturgical life.
- "They shall still bear fruit in old age"
 - Usually when a tree gets old, it doesn't bring forth fruit - but what King David says is that this tree will still bear fruit
 - Even if he is great in age, but his spirit is still like a youth - flourishing
- Bearing fruit in old age
 - The world sees the time of old age as a time of weakness, having given up their strength
 - But God sees it differently: "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)
 - Even if my body is getting weaker, my spirit can be getting stronger
 - In youth, we plant. In old age, we harvest.

The Value of Later Years in God's Mind

- God does not give anyone a day without meaning - He is the God of Life. Every period of our life has a message
- Later Years
 - Message of Wisdom
 - Message of Experience
 - Message of Steadfast Faith
 - A sign that someone lived in the pasture of the Lord
 - What about someone who has alzheimers, etc. - through them the Lord gives blessing to others. Those who serve them. They have the chance to live the commandment "I was sick and you visited me" - "I was hungry and you fed me" - etc.
- "The silver-haired head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it is found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 16:31)
- It is not characterized by number of years, but in the steadfastness of the heart in the faith
 - Even if one lived his youth far from God, but in old age started to live the life of righteousness and holiness, the Lord will accept him

Later Years are the Years of Fruitfulness not the Years of Stagnation

- We all remember HH Pope Shenouda III - until the end before his departure, he didn't stop doing his meetings and giving sermons
- A few weeks before his departure he said "I want to write you a book about Jehovah's Witnesses" - he had a goal and a plan
- If God is giving me years, these years are for me to work and to be fruitful with them
- The fruit
 - Peace and Contentment (riḏā)
 - "Lord now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30)
 - Lord I saw your work in my life - I saw your love and I saw your provision
- Deep Prayers and Contemplation
- Stories from HEMY
 - An elderly man told him that he would pray all of the hours of the Agpeya in their time. So he would wake up at night to pray the Midnight Hour, and he would put a towel at the crack of the door so that it would not be known.
 - HEMY's grandfather would wake up very early - before the light - and he would stand and pray. HEMY is sleeping, but his grandfather is not aware that he is awake and seeing him
- Fruit is not just by the service of the flesh
 - If I'm not able to go and visit someone sick or imprisoned
 - I'm not able to serve someone who is poor
 - Fruit is by prayer for others, encouragement to others, kind words, leadership to my children and grandparents and the children of the church

- HEMY remembers a man (Amm Rizkalla) who would stand in Vespers Praise and alternate with the Cantor. Even when his body could not stand, he would sit on the pew. He memorized it and didn't need the psalmody. HEMY remembers that he would love to sing the verse: "Your name is sweet and blessed on the mouths of your saints." He would never miss Vespers or Matins or Liturgy. Many days in the week. And he would ask them - "I didn't see you in Vespers, I missed you, where were you??"

Spiritual Warfare in the Later Years

- Devil does not leave you
- Different warfare and how do we answer them
- To be fruitful in my later years, I have to recognize these spiritual wars and know how to answer them
- War of Despair, Hopelessness (ya2s)
 - "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)
 - ³ "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth,
Who have been carried from the womb:
⁴ Even to *your* old age, I *am* He,
And *even* to gray hairs I will carry *you!*
I have made, and I will bear;
Even I will carry, and will deliver *you.*" (Isaiah 46:3-4)
 - The devil will trick me to tell me that God has forsaken me, that He has left me.
 - God is closer to us in times of weakness, more than any other time.
- War of Loneliness (wa7da)
 - Isolation as my kids or grandkids are busy with their responsibilities and their homes
 - Maybe some of my friends have departed
 - "When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then the Lord will take care of me." (Psalm 27:10)
 - Cling to the Lord more
- War of Fear of Sickness or Death
 - The Lord gave us freedom from fear and sickness and death by His Resurrection
 - "¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2)
 - Christ took flesh in order that He can die so that by His death, He can destroy the power of death
 - "I am the Resurrection and the Life"
 - My faith in the Resurrection can overcome the battle of Fear of Sickness or Death
 - "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8)
- War of Regret (naddam)
 - Painful memories, feelings of regret

- If I had a period in my life that I was far, or if I did some sins in my life, or I made mistakes in raising my children - sometimes these come to me in spiritual warfare in my later years
- God's promise is that he accepted even the laborers of the 11th hour
- Isaiah 1:18-19
 - "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the Lord,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.
¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land;"
- God is faithful, even if we are not faithful.

Deepest Union with God

- The later years are an opportunity to be united at the deepest level with God
- In the days of my youth, I have many plans and many belongings and hopes and dreams, I want to make money and start a family and have a nice house, etc. There is much to attach me to the world.
- But in my later years, there is less to attach me to the world and more to attach me to the heavens.
- Sanctify the time - every moment in my life is preparation for eternal life.
- As my body gets weaker, so my soul gets stronger. - St Isaac the Syrian
- Many people in later years occupy themselves with things that don't benefit
 - Church politics
 - Their kids and their kids' spouses and the decisions they make and their problems
 - Politics
 - Sports
 - Watching TV 24 hours a day
 - This is a time for DEEP (3ameeqa) Connection with God
- What can I do?
 - Prayer
 - For the world
 - For our families, children, grandchildren
 - For our churches, congregations, servants, priests
 - For the peace of the world
 - Teaching
 - From your experience
 - "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: ² that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;"
 - We sit with the elders and we ask for their experience in life

- The priests do this and go sit with the elder priests to learn from their experience in life
- "3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." (Titus 2:1-5)
 - Some people say "my parents get involved in our problems, etc." but instead my role is to be a teacher of good things - to give advice to love your husband, love your children, live in peace, obey your husband, take care of your home, be modest, etc.
- Peace
 - "Blessed are the peacemakers"
 - If my son has a problem with his wife or with his daughter or something - my job is not to get involved and back him up and go against the other. But my job is to be a peacemaker
 - In the church, to be a model of peace in the congregation
- Thanksgiving
 - Our children and grandchildren should see us being thankful - even in pain or sickness.
 - This is the TEACHER of the next generation

Living in Joy

1. Give thanks daily
 - Give Thanks Always Rejoice Always.
 - Give thanks and then rejoice not "I will be thankful when I rejoice"
 - When I give thanks, then I will be joyful (not the opposite)
2. Forgive and Forget
 - When you forgive, you are the one who has joy
3. Read the Scripture EVERY DAY
 - And be filled
 - Even if it's 10 chapters, 15 chapters
4. Attend Liturgy regularly
 - The Greatest work that creation can do. Now I have a chance to attend weekdays since I am not working. Behold Emmanuel our God is with us now on the altar.
5. Participate in a small or simple service
 - Ask about someone, encourage someone, check on someone who is sick, Someone who didn't come to liturgy, pray with him - even if just by phone.
 - Fr Youhanna Tadros with HGB David
 - In his later years, he couldn't go out for visitations, so he would do it over the phone.
 - One day he called HGB David, not realizing that he was calling Sayedna. He thought he's just calling a youth from his church named David. So he asked HG "Hi David how are you?" - "Are you praying your Agpeya?" - "Are you reading your bible?" - "Are you attending liturgies regularly?"

- He didn't say "oh visitation is for the young priests" - but he continued with his service
 - Call someone on the phone and read a Bible verse with him, pray with him, ask about him
6. Remember that you are loved and carried by God
 7. Let your heart be filled with hope and share this hope with others
 - The Lord is my shepherd, I shall need nothing
 - "I shall need nothing"
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Revision #3

Created 2026-01-29 01:02:32 UTC by Morcous Wahba

Updated 2026-01-29 13:06:48 UTC by Morcous Wahba