

How to Stay Young

by R. Stanley

Spirituality is the most important factor in enabling us stay young, and it is the state of the inner man that's reflected on the outside.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34:7, Joshua 14:11, Psalm 92:13, Psalm 103:1, Isaiah 40:29, Isaiah 65:17, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 1 John 2:12, Revelation 2:2

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Youthfulness In Christ"

Description

R. Stanley preaches about the desire to stay young and the importance of spirituality in maintaining youthfulness. He emphasizes the need for inner renewal reflected outwardly, citing Apostle Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 4:16. The sermon focuses on five spiritual exercises from the Bible to help individuals stay young, including praising God for His benefits (Psalm 103:1-5), waiting before the Lord for strength (Isaiah 40:29-31), serving actively and joyfully (Deuteronomy 34:7), enjoying fellowship with God's people (Psalm 92:13-14), and spending time with young people and men of vision (Joshua 14:11).

Transcript

Everybody wants to live long, but nobody wants to get old. Eventhough ageing cannot be avoided, people try to hide it. Hair dye is one of the fast-selling cosmetics! "Old" people prefer to be called as "senior" citizens! It's an instinct in man to stay and appear young.

At 58 this year (2004) though I am not old enough to advise senior citizens, I am not too young to do it either. So many books and articles have been published by the secular press giving tips on maintaining youthfulness. They mostly talk about food habits, physical exercises and mental attitudes. This article is from a spiritual perspective. It is the state of the inner man that's reflected on the outside. Apostle Paul the aged testified, "Eventhough our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

Spirituality is the most important factor in enabling us stay young. It is said,

You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt;

as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear;

as young as your hope, as old as your despair.

Instead of worrying about adding years to our life we should try adding life to our years. Here lies the secret why some feel old at forty whereas others feel young at eighty. I've gathered here from the Bible five spiritual exercises to help you stay young.

1. Keep praising God for your past, present and future.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy Name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that YOUR YOUTH IS RENEWED like the eagle's" (Psa 103:1-5).

We Christians recite the first two verses of this Psalm too often but we fail to realize that a spirit of praise and thanksgiving reminds us how God Himself is interested in the renewal of our youthfulness. Give no place to complaining or murmuring. When you "forget" God's benefits, you dump yourself in depression and die of self-sympathy.

Count your blessings instead of your crosses;

Count your gains instead of your losses;

Count your joys instead of your woes;

Count your friends instead of your foes;

Count your smiles instead of your tears;

Count your courage instead of your fears;

Count your full years instead of your lean;

Count your kind deeds instead of your mean;

Count your health instead of your wealth;

Count on God instead of yourself!

Salvation from sin is one benefit the remembrance of which can excite us everyday (Isa 12:3). Any other good thing in life gets its enjoyment value decreased day by day. But the remembrance of God's saving grace keeps on intensifying our joy. The song of salvation is ever "new" (Psa 40:1-3). That's why David puts forgiveness at the top of the list of God's benefits (Psa 103:3a). When we rejoice in the God of our salvation, our mind is in a state of happiness. Medical science confirms that happy people in general are healthy people.

Read through the 103rd Psalm as often as possible. It will read like your autobiography. It speaks about fathers, children, generations, lifespan, covenant, etc. All these are subjects of interest for those growing old. The Psalm begins and ends with, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Praise does not come forth naturally all the time. I must "command" my soul to bless God!

The Psalmist elsewhere confesses, "You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust FROM MY YOUTH. By You I have been upheld FROM MY BIRTH; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My PRAISE shall be CONTINUALLY of You" (71:5,6).

2. Wait before the Lord with meditation and reflection.

"The everlasting God gives power to the WEAK, and to those who have no might He INCREASES STRENGTH. Even the YOUTHS shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall RENEW THEIR STRENGTH; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa 40:29-31).

It's good to go jogging for improving blood circulation and increasing muscle strength. But the daily exercise of sitting before the Lord with an open Bible and an open mind, as the above Scripture passage promises, will renew our strength and restore spiritual energy to our inner man. The blessedness of brokenness belongs to those who spend unhurried time before the Lord their Creator. Hardening of the heart ages people more quickly than hardening of the arteries. Comparing his life on earth to a pilgrimage, Psalmist David testifies concerning God's word, "Your statues have been my SONGS in the house of my pilgrimage" (Psa 119:54). Recalling his many tears and fears of life he affirms to God, "Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction" (119:92).

Every average Christian has in his bookshelf numerous un-read books which he has purchased over the years. Use the leisure time of the old age to read these books, especially the biographies and autobiographies of God's saints and servants. You are never too old to read. Hear apostle Paul addressing Timothy: "The time of my departure is at hand... I have finished the race... Be diligent to come to me quickly... Bring the cloak... when you come -- AND THE BOOKS, especially the parchments" (2 Tim 4:6,7,9,13).

Your spirit will soar high when you read how the saints of old handled their old age problems. One afternoon in October 1931 Amy Carmichael fell and broke a leg and dislocated an ankle; complications set in which, added to her thirtysix years of unbroken service in India, left her an invalid for the rest of her life. Yet from her bed -- often lying completely flat -- she continued her ministry in Dohnavur, South India. She kept in touch with the outside world through her correspondence and, with help, wrote thousands of letters. Already the author of many books, she wrote a further thirteen works during this period, as well as revising her other titles and producing more poetry. In all her struggles she learned "to know Christ, in the power of His resurrection, and in the fellowship of His sufferings."

Listen to music and message tapes. These days we have the entire New Testament or the Bible on tapes. Hearing is sometimes less strenuous than reading in old age. A Jewish proverb says, "For the ignorant, old age is as winter; for the learned, it is a harvest!"

3. Serve God and men actively and joyfully.

Moses was 80 when God called him. Although he cited many excuses, he never mentioned his old age. He was active in serving God and His people till his death. The Scripture records, "Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour abated" (Dt 34:7).

There may be retirement from secular jobs and even from Christian ministerial positions. But God never relieves anyone from serving Him just because of age. It is advised that retired people take up regular voluntary work in service organisations. Idling will lead to all sorts of physiological and psychological maladies. An idle man's mind becomes the devil's workshop. Don't lose your enthusiasm. Walterson was right when he said, "Years wrinkle the face, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul."

Though Zacharias was "well advanced in years," he was serving as a priest before God. It was when he was burning incense in the Temple he had the angelic visitation with the promise of the birth of John the Baptist, the greatest prophet ever to be born (Lk 1:6-13).

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, travelled 250 miles a day for 40 years; preached 40000 sermons; produced 400 books; knew 10 languages. At 83 he was annoyed that he could not write more than 15 hours a day without hurting his eyes. At 86 he was ashamed he could not preach more than twice a day. He complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5-30 in the morning!

History abounds with such testimonies of senior citizens. Michelangelo was still composing poetry and designing structures in his 89th year. He painted the ceiling of Sistine Chapel on his back on a scaffold at near 90. Milton completed Paradise Lost when 57 and Paradise Regained at 63. George Bernard Shaw wrote some of his famous plays at 80. Webster wrote his monumental dictionary at 70. Mother Teresa, a heart patient with so many ailments, never lost her smile in ministering to the unwanted and unlovable until she died at 87.

I admire my parents who served the Lord and ministered to people till death. Daddy (1914-1973) who retired as an Army officer and later as a security officer from an Engineering College was selling Bibles, Testaments and hymnbooks till the day prior to his death. Mummy (1924-1981) who had been operated for breast cancer kept visiting Christian homes, praying for families, and raising funds for missionary work until she could walk or write no more due to secondaries which terminated her life. My father-in-law is an 89 year old ophthalmologist. He still goes to his private clinic to assist his ophthalmologist son. My mother-in-law is 85 and unable to walk normally. She still prays for people, speaks to women's fellowship meetings though by sitting on a chair, and mobilizes funds to support missionaries. Margaret Deland's advice to old people is intelligent: "As soon as you feel too old to do a thing, do it!"

4. Enjoy the fellowship of God's people.

"Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear FRUIT in old age; they shall be FRESH and FLOURSHING" (Psa 92:13,14).

There's fullness of joy in God's presence. When we gather with the fellow saints in the Name of Christ and worship God, our hearts rejoice and tongues are glad. This also blesses our physique with a refreshing restfulness (Acts 2:25,26). Though the things of the world give us temporary kicks of pleasure, they ultimately sap us of our vitality and vibrance. It is because the devil is basically a thief. But the presence of God we enjoy in the sheepfold of Jesus adds life to life so we may enjoy it abundantly (Jn 10:10; Acts 2:28).

Sustained youthfulness is one of the promises of the New Heaven and New Earth. "No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old!" (Isa 65:17,20). What is New Heaven and New Earth other than the "literal" presence of God in our midst? (Rev 21:1-3). The "spiritual" presence of God we can experience today does have the characteristic of the future glory, though partially.

It is good to involve in social clubs, but beware of getting mixed up too much with the worldlings. Gossip and vain chats will leak your spiritual vigour. "Nobody grows old by merely living a number of years. People grow old only by deserting their ideals," is an old saying.

Don't feel left out if you cannot shout or sing or jump like others in a worship service or a prayer meeting. Though these expressions are welcome, it is the spirit of the worshipper that ultimately matters. What you mean and how much you mean it is what God is interested in. That is the meaning of worshipping God in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

5. Spend time with young people and men of vision.

Caleb at 85 referring to an incident that happened fortyfive years before testified, " I am as strong this day as I was on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in" (Josh 14:11). This confession he made exactly on his 85th birthday (v 10c). For his birthday he desired not a sponge cake but a steep mountain (v 12)! All this was because he refused to join the pessimistic majority (Num 13:30-33). Overcautiousness is typical of old age whereas young people are known for venturing and taking risks. Risking is a companion of faith.

Earl Wilson observed, "We spend the first half of our lives trying to understand the older generation, and the second half trying to understand the younger generation." Alongwith a few College students of my age, in the sovereign plan of God, I founded the Blessing Youth Mission in 1971 when I was 25. Eventhough we have consistently maintained the youth emphasis in all the activities of the Mission, most of us leaders in our fifties experience tensions with the youth because of the generation gap. Unless we spend sufficient time with the youngsters to listen to them, play with them and enjoy their jokes, we become irrelevant in what we write or speak to them. Personally, this exercise keeps my spirit youthful. I am always amazed how the apostle John in his nineties could address specifically the old people, youngsters and little children (1 Jn 2:12-14).

Associating with young people is not only for your own good but also for theirs. Years ago an old professor took me aside after I preached in an evening service and told me, "Stanley, I'm glad God has taken you in His hand. Give yourself to simple living and high thinking. This is the only advice I have for you." Perhaps but for this timely counsel, I would have succumbed to the pull of the material-minded ministerial stream that runs in full force these days. I once spent an evening with George Verwer the founder of Operation Mobilisation. He was telling me how he had become tired of self-made apostles and high sounding titles (Rev 2:2b). This has given me an unforgettable warning to discern between leadership that is self-assumed and God-appointed. While having tea with the saintly prophet Leonard Ravenhill (1907-1994) in his humble home, he was sharing with me how he had been weeping rather than sleeping the previous night over the condition of Christendom. More than all his revival classics that I had read, this one statement intensified my burden for revival. I can go on listing the indelible impressions that God's seasoned men have left on my heart.

In conclusion let me quote the conviction of an unknown old man:

I shall not mind the whiteness of my hair,
Or that slow steps falter on the stair,
Or that young friends hurry as they pass,
Or what strange image greets me in the glass --
If I can feel as the roots feel in the sod

That I am growing old to bloom before the face of God!

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