

Aging

WITH

Grace

FLOURISHING IN
AN ANTI-AGING CULTURE

Sharon W. Betters
& Susan Hunt

“My childhood dream was to one day become a ‘godly old lady.’ At the time, that goal didn’t seem particularly daunting. Now that I’m in my sixties, it sometimes feels like climbing Mount Everest. Always a few steps ahead of me, Susan Hunt has encouraged and inspired me to press on in my journey. She has also been a spiritual ‘grandmother’ to the True Woman ministry since it launched. She has given us all a vision of flourishing in old age, for the glory of God and the good of his people. In this book, Susan and Sharon Betters have teamed together to provide perspective, wisdom, and hope for women coming behind them. They call us to keep our eyes on Christ—the prize—and to persevere to the summit, dependent on his grace every step of the way.”

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author; Founder, Revive Our Hearts and True Woman

“Some women seem to grow increasingly lovely with every year that passes. I want to learn from women who display that type of beauty and grace. That’s why I’m so thankful for *Aging with Grace*. This book is a wealth of wisdom for women of all ages to learn from God’s word the secret of aging with grace—I highly recommend it!”

Melissa B. Kruger, Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*

“As I embark on my seventh decade, I find myself saying things about ‘finishing well,’ while at the same time moaning about the aches and trials that are my unbidden companions. But one of the gifts I love most are the friends who are walking with me. Sharon Betters and Susan Hunt are two of those friends. Let me encourage you to join them as they encourage you to walk through the final steps of your journey with faith and joy. They have encouraged me.”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*

“As a woman on the cusp of her forties, I’ve harbored a secret fear of aging. More than the changes of my physical appearance, I’ve feared becoming obsolete as I age. I read *Aging with Grace* with a lot of tears and thankfulness as my fears were turned to praise. Sharon Betters and Susan Hunt address the realities of aging with biblical encouragement to fix our gaze on our timeless God who will finish the work he started in us. Because God is faithful, our growth in Christ will continue as we age. This is a book I will return to over and over again.”

Glenna Marshall, author, *The Promise Is His Presence and Everyday Faithfulness*

“Seasoned with wisdom, *Aging with Grace* offers us the biblical recipe for a life marked by hoping in Christ. Through examples of women in the Bible as well as women in the church today, Susan Hunt and Sharon Betters guide us to reflect on God’s faithfulness to his people throughout all of redemptive history, reminding us that it’s never too late to sink our roots in the soil of God’s word for his glory and our good.”

Hunter Beless, Founder and Executive Director, *Journeywomen* podcast

“As I read the accounts of the godly women in this book, I was confronted with thoughts about flourishing in aging that I had not previously considered. I felt guided by godly compassion and wise instruction, rather than by the frustrations of past significance or selfish pay-attention-to-me-nowness. This book is truly about flourishing in the years of God’s maturing grace.”

Bryan Chapell, Pastor Emeritus, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois

“Through their insightful observations on Scripture, telling the stories of godly women in the Bible, and sharing contemporary testimonies, the authors show us how to flourish in our experiences with God and impact on others. Reading *Aging with Grace* will not only bless you but will also allow you to bless others.”

John Dunlop, MD, Internal Medicine, Geriatrics, Yale School of Medicine; author, *Finishing Well to the Glory of God*

“*Aging with Grace* is a remarkably authentic, heartwarming, and scriptural balm for the soul in the context of growing older. Sharon Betters and Susan Hunt consider the wisdom of godly biblical women in light of their own and other’s personal experiences, thereby guiding readers on how to age with grace in an anti-aging culture. Gospel hope radiates from each page, so read and be blessed.”

Peter A. Lillback, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

“In *Aging with Grace*, Sharon Betters and Susan Hunt provide a beautiful picture of fruitfulness in the later season of life. They explore God’s word to all generations, as they also introduce you to women shaped by divine truth in good times and bad. This resource is valuable for any leader who longs to serve God’s people with biblical wisdom and compassion.”

Stephen T. Estock, Coordinator, PCA Discipleship Ministries

“Susan Hunt and Sharon Betters have written a book that is simultaneously timeless and timely. Practical and inspirational, warmly personal and profoundly biblical, apt for young and old alike, *Aging with Grace* needs to go right to the top of your must-read nightstand stack.”

George Grant, Pastor, Parish Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

“Reading this book made me feel like my two older sisters, walking toward Jesus in deep conversation, turned and saw me trying to find my own way, looked at each other, then ran back to grab my hands, laugh with joy, and resume with me between them. You are never too young or too old to glean solid, biblical, and practical wisdom from *Aging with Grace*.”

Karen Grant, wife of George Grant, pastor, Parish Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

“In a society that seems to value only youth and viability, Sharon Betters and Susan Hunt reach deep into Scripture to illustrate God’s value on his children as they age and mature. They help calm the fears of aging while pointing to often hidden treasures, perspectives, and the depth of God’s presence and faithfulness as we age.”

Peter Rosenberger, author; Host, *Hope for the Caregiver*

Aging with Grace

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Flourishing in an Anti-Aging Culture

Sharon W. Betters
and Susan Hunt

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“The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. . . .
They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green.”

Psalm 92:12, 14

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To our husbands,
Chuck Betters and Gene Hunt, who
for decades have shown us the way
of righteousness, and now daily show
us the way of aging with grace.

To our friends who open their hearts
and share their stories in this book:

Carol Arnold, Ruth Auffarth,
Dianne Balch, Pam Benton, Sherry Bitler,
Jerdone Davis, Judy Didier, Jane Patete,
Lynda Tedeschi, and Barbara Thompson

We are grateful for your transparency
in showing us the brokenness of
flourishing, and your hope, which shows
the beauty of flourishing. Your stories
supremely show that aging with grace is
impossible apart from God's grace.

Foreword

KAREN HODGE

*Women's Ministry Coordinator,
Presbyterian Church in America*

When do you start to finish? Today is the day!

Inside every older woman is a little girl trying to figure out who she will be when she grows up. We long to flourish and thrive, not just in old age but right here and now. When I was twenty-nine and struggling with this question (and, by the way, I still am), Susan and Sharon entered my life. I watched and learned the shape of godliness from their lives. I can testify after serving alongside them twenty-plus years that they are still “full of sap and green” (Ps. 92:14). Now they have written what they have learned about aging with grace. This is the book I need now, and it’s the book I want to give to younger women.

Are we promised tomorrow? Today is the day!

The word of God describes life like a mist or a blade of grass (Ps. 103:15). Our season for flourishing is fleeting and temporal, but eternity is forever. Living in light of eternity

impacts not just us, but our children's children. "But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, / and his righteousness to children's children, / to those who keep his covenant / and remember to do his commandments" (Ps. 103:17–18). The pages of this book remind us to begin with the end in mind, that our reference point for life is God, and that his word is our authority. "The grass withers, the flower fades, / but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isa. 40:8).

Do you desire to flourish to the finish? Today is the day!

Remember my friends, we are not running this race alone. We are surrounded by many who were faithful to the finish. Run with the women Sharon and Susan introduce us to in this book. They will disciple you to lay aside the life-taking thinking and actions that encumber you. Run with women in your church by studying this book together and helping one another divert your gaze from the worldly anti-aging culture and fix your eyes on Jesus. (A leader's guide is available.) Start running, sister, and run until we get home (Heb. 12:1–2)!

Only one life 'twill soon be past.

Only what is done for Christ will last.¹

Now join me in a conversation with Sharon and Susan.

Karen Hodge: When did you start thinking about aging?

1 Attributed to missionary C. T. Studd.

Sharon Betters: My husband, Chuck, was twenty-one when he became pastor of a small church. Because my childhood pastor's wife taught a Bible study, I thought I should too. Every week five elderly women sat at our table and let me teach them. Who did I think I was? Yet they loved and encouraged me, listening as though I knew what I was doing. They were life-givers. But there were also a couple of elderly women who scared me with their sharp tongues and criticism of my husband's preaching and leadership. They were life-takers. All of these women were rooted in the church, yet not all of them offered kindness and love. That's when I started my quest to understand God's view of aging and how I could intentionally prepare to be the sweet, life-giving old lady who encouraged young women just starting out in life.

Susan Hunt: I think my obsession with thinking about being an older woman was largely due to my passion for and commitment to the Titus 2 mandate that older women "are to teach what is good, and so train the young women" (Titus 2:3–4). I wondered when I would be an older woman. Now, my aging body assures me I am one, and I love the perspective from this season of life.

Karen: What prompted you to write about aging?

Sharon: Even though we are both older women—I'm seventy-two and Susan is eighty—it's doubtful either of us would have thought about writing this book. However, a workshop I was

asked to teach on purposefully preparing for old age resonated with older and younger women. I laughed when some of them asked me to write a book.

Susan: When Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth asked me to speak on the Titus 2 older woman for a True Woman conference, I was shocked at the response from women of all ages. Sharon and I began discussing the question, “What does God say about aging?” We studied Scripture and prayed. Between us we have forty-two children and grandchildren (including spouses). We were compelled to write what we learned for our generation and theirs. It feels outlandish to write about ending well when we haven’t ended, but we do not write only about what we have experienced; we write about what God’s word tells us. We are awestruck by his calling and promise for this season of life.

Karen: Why do you believe our culture is anti-aging?

Sharon: American culture idolizes youth and measures value by what a person produces for society. When older people stop contributing financially through working, show signs of wear and tear, and slow down mentally and physically, culture considers us worthless. Some see the elderly as a drain on society. Why wouldn’t I dread aging when I have been trained to chase after youth and do everything I can to slow down the inexorable march into old age? Unless we are purposeful in fighting the throw-away, anti-aging messages with a biblical worldview, we will face this season with fear, dread, and denial.

Susan: Secular psychiatrist Carl Jung first coined the phrase “the afternoon of life” and defined it as fifty-six to eighty-three years of age. He said: “Wholly unprepared, we embark upon the second half of life. Or are there perhaps colleges for forty-year-olds which prepare them for their coming life and its demands as the ordinary colleges introduce our young people to a knowledge of the world?”² To answer Jung’s question, the world cannot prepare us because it has no hope or power to give us. Culture’s false narrative about aging is the church’s opportunity to proclaim the hope and power of the gospel to equip God’s people to flourish even in old age.

Karen: How do you approach the topic in this book?

Susan: Our approach is very simple—we asked the Lord to teach us how to glorify him as older women, we studied the Scriptures, and we share some of the things we learned. We alternate; I write a chapter on *Thinking Biblically* about aging using Psalms 92 and 71, then Sharon writes a chapter on *Living Covenantally* in old age. This was an interdependent endeavor. Our ideas flowed into each other’s work, our voices became one in our desire to “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6).

Sharon: Throughout Scripture we often see an explanation followed by an example. The *Living Covenantally* chapters are

2 *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 8, *Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche*, ed. and trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (1969; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), np.

examples of the explanation in the *Thinking Biblically* chapters. We don't consider ourselves experts on aging with grace, so we selected older women in Scripture who illustrate the principles in Susan's chapters. I soon knew I was on holy ground. I often paused and whispered, "What am I missing? Tell me your story. Let me get inside your skin and show me the treasures hidden in your soul." I am forever changed by getting to know these matriarchs better, and we pray you will be too. They show us what aging with grace looks like and how this is not an independent endeavor—it happens in community with God's people.

Karen: Is there a prevailing theme you do not want readers to miss?

Sharon: Yes! We want readers to truly believe that the Bible gives us not only the promise of bearing fruit in old age, but it also gives us a road map to grow and flourish in this grace. We want readers to ask, "What if aging, though challenging, is not a season of purposelessness, but rather an opportunity to discover our true identity in a way we couldn't in the first half of life? What if we purposefully prepare for the afternoon of life while we are in the first half of life?" And for those already in the afternoon of life—perhaps ill-prepared, feeling worthless, and rudderless—we want them to know it's not too late to experience God's grace and, through his work, make an eternal impact in this season of life.

Susan: Our point is that aging with grace, or what the Bible calls growing in grace, is impossible apart from God's grace.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Who then can be saved?’ . . . Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (Matt. 19:25–26). This book is not a list of ideas to become a gracious older woman. It’s about the life-long adventure of God giving his children the desire and ability to do all things—even aging with grace—through him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). We have no nifty formulas to give you. Actually, there is nothing new in this book; but we don’t need anything new. God has given us the means of grace—his word, prayer, worship, sacraments, fellowship—to grow in our relationship with him. And he says to us, “Stand by the roads, and look, / and ask for the ancient paths / where the good way is; and walk in it, / and find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). So come walk the ancient paths with us as we explore God’s promise and provision for aging with grace.

Sharon: We asked some of our friends who are at least seventy to tell their stories. We are confident their stories will disciple you, as they have us, to age with grace. Their stories embody the message of this book, so we offer two of them to read before you begin chapter 1.

Ruth’s Story

Ruth Auffarth partnered in ministry with her husband, Bob, for over forty-six years, most of that time in Newark, Delaware. She has three children, thirteen grandchildren, and four

great-grandchildren. Hundreds of women claim Ruth as their spiritual mother. She was widowed at seventy-three.

I'm eighty-eight years old and live in Gainesville, Georgia. In this season of life, flourishing means being overwhelmed by the difference between my "receivings" and my "deservings," as an old Puritan observed.³ Looking back on my life, I see God's sweet hand of providence again and again. Each day is a gift. Now that life has slowed down, I have more time to study the Scriptures, and oh, how much more precious that time has become. God's thoughts jump off the page with encouragement and joy that can be applied to the exact situation I am facing. Early mornings on my porch I pray, "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, / that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (Ps. 90:14).

In praying for family and friends I confidently ask, "Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, / and for as many years as we have seen evil" (Ps. 90:15).

Yes, the days of affliction come. Part of flourishing is fervently grabbing hold of the Lord through his promises. He says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). Gladness comes with his presence. As you grow older, expectations change. You come to realize that there is no perfect family, church, situation, or society. Because we live in a broken world, we begin to marvel that things go as well as they do because God gives grace upon

3 Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 12.

grace. We look for his intervening hand of love as we work through difficulties. Struggling and rejoicing can happen at the same time as we let the struggles bring us closer to God's warm embrace.

Another gift God gives for our flourishing is the local church. Active participation in a shared faith makes us a real family as we worship, sing, pray, serve, rejoice, and sorrow together.

We find joy when people respond to the gospel. After years of teaching Bible studies, I now attend several women's studies as a student, where I find younger women are hungry to hear from an older woman. The Lord also gives me the privilege of counseling at the local crisis pregnancy center.

Finally, I am focused on God's promise that "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me / all the days of my life, / and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD / forever" (Ps. 23:6).

Dianne's Story

Dianne Balch and her husband, Dave, spent forty-four years establishing various lay ministries nationally and internationally. While they were in New York, she directed the women's ministry at Redeemer Church. She has two children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

I began the year with a month of reflection. Advice from forty years ago, when I faced a life-shattering trial, resurfaced; "Don't look back, except to thank God for what he has pulled

you out of or brought you through. Then ask, ‘What am I going to do with what I have left?’”

As I reflected, I remembered.

When Dave was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer, we prayed the prayer that never fails: “Thy will be done.” God gave us peaceful hearts, and Dave arrived in heaven seven months later. We were passionate partners, crazy in love. After fifty-four years of marriage, I grieved deeply, and I worshiped more deeply than ever before.

When my colon cancer surgery and recovery were heaped onto ten years of Chronic Lyme Disease, I prayed for strength to trust the Lord with *all* my heart. I grieved the loss of independence, but I knew the peace of his presence with me.

When I pondered how long I should remain in a home, church, and community I loved, I prayed, “As I approach seventy-nine years, is it time to make my twenty-fifth move and go to another state?” My month of reflection produced clarity only God and his word can give. It’s time. *Let go.*

So I’ve let go of teaching the Bible after forty-five years, leading women in evangelism and discipleship efforts, “Titus-twoing” with teens through eighty-somethings, and loving all of it.

I’ve let go of my home, furniture, and keepsakes, and moved west, only to return two months later to my southern community and church. The Lord led me through a trial to see where I belong and why. Weary after months of letting go, I’ve shed tears, counted blessings, and known Jesus’s presence

and comfort. It's been hard, but I've found freedom; I have been sorrowful but always rejoicing (2 Cor. 6:10).

My reflections also reminded me of what I will *not* let go—trusting God's promises that Christ is in me, his grace is sufficient, and his power is made perfect in weakness, and praying for unsaved or suffering family and friends.

So what am I going to do with the time I have left? My answer is the same as it was forty years ago—*make it count*. Only the Lord who directs my path knows what that will look like. I may flounder, but he is faithful. Oh, how I love Jesus!

A Note from the Authors

From Sharon

Prolonged church conflict, life-threatening breast cancer, loss of our sixteen-year-old son Mark. Add to these the care of our family and life as a pastor's wife. Jesus wasn't joking when he said, "In the world you will have trouble." The Lord did not put me in a sweet cocoon of grace during these dark times; I often wrestled to reconcile his love with his sovereignty.

Here's the good news. Jesus finished his dire warning in John 16:33 with this promise: "Take heart; I have overcome the world." He did not reject me when I struggled to trust him, but instead held me tightly in his grip, where I experienced unconditional love and learned to trust him once more. I experienced his faithfulness in ways I never thought possible. I wrote this book out of the context of years of experiencing Jesus's overcoming grace in my life. Your story may be similar or different, but I pray this book will encourage you to trust his overcoming power, no matter what path he calls you to walk. May we look forward to arriving home—where we will fully experience the victory won by King Jesus.

From Susan

A few weeks after this book was submitted to Crossway, my beloved husband, Gene, died. He was sick for only about three months, and until the last few days we thought he would recover. He was a vibrant, active, joyful man. His life was a celebration of the power of the gospel. Seeing him lying in a hospital bed, getting weaker by the day, was shocking; but it was a sweet and sacred journey as our children, grandchildren, and I were with him to his final breath on this earth. It is important to me for you to know this book did *not* flow out of that context. This book was completed before Gene's home-going. Writing this book was God's gift to prepare us for this season of suffering and sorrow. I don't think it would have occurred to me in the fog of fatigue and uncertainty to think about either of us flourishing, but I had learned from Psalm 92 that the righteous will flourish, even in old age. My prayer for both of us was shaped by this promise.

So as you read this book, my friend, I want you to know I can now put big exclamation points on every page. God's grace is sufficient, and his grace is specific. When it's time to age, he gives aging grace. When it's time to suffer, he gives suffering grace. When it was Gene's time to die, the Lord gave dying grace. And now he is giving me grieving grace.

An *Aging with Grace* Leader's Guide with lesson plans may be ordered from:

1-800-283-1357

www.pcacdm.org/bookstore

Wonder and Worship

Psalm 92:1–4

SUSAN

Our granddaughter Suzie was about four when she slid down the stairs on her pillow just as her mother rounded the corner and saw her. Thus began the following conversation:

“Suzie! Don’t ever do that again!”

“Did you do this when you were a little girl?”

“No, my mother wouldn’t let me.”

“Who is your mother?”

Surprised she did not know this, her mom answered, “*Memommie* is my mother.”

Without flinching Suzie replied, “No, she’s not. She’s an old lady.”

Suzie is now twenty-four, which makes me a very old lady. But here's the thing: I have been happily married for fifty-six years, have three children, twelve grandchildren, and one granddaughter-in-love. You *have* to be an old lady to have these amazing blessings.

The world tells us aging is our enemy, and we should fight it; the Bible says it's our friend: "Wisdom is with the aged, / and understanding in length of days" (Job 12:12).

Let's be real—aging doesn't feel very friendly. Change is disorienting, because we settle into our roles and responsibilities and they become our identity and purpose. And now we face almost daily changes of diminishing physical abilities and energy. We need something bigger and better to make sense of it all. We need an identity and purpose that transcends it all, which is exactly what God provides in the gospel.

The gospel is big enough, good enough, and powerful enough to make every moment of every season of life significant and glorious. The one who created us promises we can flourish and bear fruit, we can be full of sap and green, even in old age (Ps. 92:12-14). These lively words indicate growth and vitality. They seem to contradict my reality as an eighty-year-old who suffers with inflammation of the connective tissue in my body that causes pain and weakness in my muscles. But this promise of growth does not mock my physical reality; it transcends it.

The gospel imperative to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18) does

not have an age limit. The same grace that gives us new life in Christ empowers that life to develop, mature, and flourish. We never finish growing. There is always more grace to experience and more to know of Christ's love. This growth is gradual. We don't produce it, but as we trust and obey God's word, we can anticipate it.

We had almost finished writing this book when I fell, damaging muscles in my neck and jaw that caused severe headaches. My kind doctor told me. "*At your age* this will take a couple of months to heal." I spent many days lying in a dark room, sometimes wondering what it would mean to age with grace if I never got better. I prayed, "Lord, what does it mean to flourish and be fruitful right now when I do not feel like doing anything?" I reflected on Psalm 92, and prayed that he would make me glad (92:4). Some days I fought fears and fatigue, but I began to realize I was not afraid. I was content, and I knew Jesus was with me. I thought, "This is not wasted time. It is growing time, because my physical weakness and pain push me to trust Jesus more. My heart is full of an ineffable gladness." Honestly, I'm shocked by that statement. The only explanation I can give is the one Jesus gives to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

So let's walk the timeless and timely path of Psalm 92 with expectant hearts, eager to know how to flourish and be fruitful as long as we live in these earthly bodies.

Psalm 92:1-4**A Song for the Sabbath**

¹ It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
² to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
³ to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
⁴ For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your
work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

The title of Psalm 92, “A Song for the Sabbath,” indicates this is a communal song that was used in the context of worship. Notice how Sinclair Ferguson connects flourishing to worship:

It is at the end of life, not only at the beginning, that Christians are most different from the rest of the world. Then the true beauty of a woman, the true character of a man, is seen for what it really is. That is why there sometimes seems to be a touch of glory and light about the lives of elderly Christians. They have remained “fresh and green” as Psalm 92 suggests, because their hearts have been given to the Lord in worship. . . . True worship puts character into our lives, humility into our bearing, strength and confidence into our witnessing. . . . Let us learn to worship God, with the faithfulness and joy of the author of Psalm 92.¹

1 Sinclair Ferguson, *A Heart for God* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 116–17.

The psalmist's unbridled joy in God is contagious. His God-centeredness is compelling.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about God? Our answer is one of the most important things about us because it reveals the arc of our life. It determines the choices we make and shows whether we understand that our identity is not based on what we do but on who we are in Christ. The psalmist leaves no doubt that his knowledge of God is not a product of his imagination or his circumstances; it is the product of God's revelation of himself in his word.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH HIS NAMES

Note the two names the psalmist uses in Psalm 92:1.

LORD is the English translation of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This is God's personal, covenant name whereby he reveals himself to us as the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God who enters into a personal, forever-relationship of love with his people. His covenant is his marriage bond with his chosen ones. The very mention of *Yahweh* immediately reminded the elderly Israelites that the Lord never stopped loving or pursuing them, even when they sinned. For us, on this side of the cross, this name brings an even fuller understanding of never-ending covenant blessings, which include:

- God's covenant plan that began in eternity past when the Father chose us in Christ and predestined us for adoption through Christ to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:4–6);

- His covenant promise in Genesis 3:15 that he will rescue us from Satan's bondage by providing an offspring of the woman who will crush Satan's head;
- His repetition of this promise throughout Scripture: "I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will live among you" (see Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:7; Deut. 29:10-13; Jer. 24:7; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev.21:3);
- The fulfillment of the promise when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14);
- The victory of the promise when the crucified Christ rose triumphantly from the grave, conquering sin and death. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57);
- The provision of the promise when the resurrected Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20);
- The expectation of the promise when "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

"O Most High" is the English translation of the Hebrew word *Elyon*, another name for God, which describes the sovereignty, majesty, and transcendent glory of our Creator and sustainer.

These two names show that the psalmist knew the familial nearness of God as his Father and the stunning transcendence of God as his King. These names bring together the themes

of covenant, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, and consummation. This is the big story that holds every moment of our story together.

We are all products of our theology. What we believe, or don't believe, about God shows up every day. Sound theology produces sound thinking and living. As we face the sorrows and physical suffering of aging, thinking biblically about who God is and who we are in Christ comforts and carries us. God's word accomplishes his purpose in us (Isa. 55:10–11).

Growing in Grace

God reveals himself to us in his word. Our flourishing happens in proportion to time spent getting to know him through his word. An ever-growing knowledge of God produces a more mature, God-centered perspective on our identity and purpose, which are the same in every season of life.

IT IS GOOD

These first three words of Psalm 92 echo God's declaration at the close of each creation day (Gen. 1), reminding us of the rhythm of work and worship established by our Creator when he "blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Gen. 2:3). God's people now gather on the first day of the week to celebrate Jesus's resurrection—his triumphant victory

over sin and death—and to anticipate the everlasting Sabbath rest “for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9).

The psalmist tells us, “It is good to give thanks” (Ps. 92:1). The apostle Paul also exhorts those who are in Christ to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:16–18).

We don’t necessarily give thanks *for* all things but rather *in* all things—in every situation and relationship—we can “give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, / for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps. 106:1).

Growing in Grace

As we move through the various seasons of life, the steady rhythm of weekly corporate worship is one way we regularly stop and unite our voices with others to give thanks to the Lord for his amazing grace. This helps to develop the grace of gratitude, which is a means and evidence of flourishing.

MORNING AND EVENING DECLARATION

In Psalm 92:2, the psalmist tells us it is good to begin and end each day by declaring God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. “Steadfast love” (from the Hebrew word *hesed*, sometimes translated “lovingkindness”) is a rich, multifaceted concept. Sinclair Ferguson writes:

Hesed [is] one of the “big” words in the Old Testament Scriptures. It appears around 250 times, and dominantly with reference to God himself. He is a God of loving-kindness. . . . When God revealed himself to Moses, he said that he was a God full of *hesed* (Exodus 34:6)—not simply love or kindness in an ordinary sense. It means God’s deep goodness expressed in his covenant commitment, his absolute loyalty, his obligating of himself to bring to fruition the blessings that he has promised, whatever it may cost him personally to do that.²

It cost God his Son. It cost the Son his life. Jesus embodied *hesed*.

We see the triune God’s unrelenting faithfulness to his covenant of redemption when the first man and woman committed cosmic treason against him. He could have ended it all, but because he had chosen a people in Christ before he created the world, he pursued the man and woman. They were hiding, but he was seeking; and he still is: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He promises, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; / therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you” (Jer. 31:3). Our sin can never out-distance God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. But the question is, How do we continue in faithfulness? Jesus tells us, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. . . .

2 Sinclair Ferguson, *Faithful God: An Exposition of the Book of Ruth* (Bryntirion, UK: Bryntirion Press, 2007). 64.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5).

The repetition of declaring the gospel to ourselves gradually becomes the melody of our soul. Faithfully declaring God’s *hesed* in word and deed develops a pattern of remaining constant even in changing circumstances. It is what Jesus called abiding—remaining, continuing, staying, enduring, submitting.

Growing in Grace

Our bodies change as we age; so do our spirits. We must guard against our hearts becoming brittle and bitter by praying for grace to abide in Christ and bear the fruit of steadfast love and faithfulness to others, even when it is costly.

GLADNESS

This exuberant statement is extraordinary: “You, O LORD, have made me glad” (Ps. 92:4). We look for gladness in people, things, and circumstances, and we are always disappointed. Even if gladness comes, it is temporary. We don’t usually connect gladness and worship. Sometimes people say, “I don’t like the worship at that church.” What does that even mean? Worship is not something we observe and critique; it is something we *do*. In fact, *it is what we were created to do*. And in doing it, the psalmist found great joy. The answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism captures this understanding of life.

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

When Moses was in the desert with a stiff-necked congregation (God's description, not mine, Ex. 33:3), he prayed. Two of his petitions were "Show me now your ways, that I may know you" and "Show me your glory" (33:13; 18). The only thing that could make sense of Moses's situation was knowing God and seeing his glory. God replied: "I will make all my goodness pass before you" (33:19). Then God hid him in the cleft of a rock and passed by, proclaiming the goodness of his own glorious character: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [*hesed*] and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." And Moses's response? He "quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped" (Ex. 34:6–9). The result? "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Ex. 34:29).

Moses's circumstances did not change, but Moses changed. He grew in his knowledge of God's character, he worshiped, and he reflected God's glory to stiff-necked people. When I was recovering from my fall, Gene's care of me continually reflected the goodness of God to me. Shortly after I recovered, Gene was hospitalized. Yes, we felt we were getting a crash course in aging. As Gene needed constant care, not knowing whether his circumstances would change, his reflection of

God's character became brighter. Even talking was exhausting, but he never failed to show kindness to our children and me, to the doctors and nurses, and to all who cared for him. He thanked us for what we did, and he always spoke of God's goodness. Whether he was giving or receiving care, his worship and reflection of his Savior never wavered. It grew. One especially difficult day our son was caring for his dad. When I thanked him for his tenderness, he responded, "It stretched me, but I kept thinking of all Dad has done for me through the years." Ah—isn't that the way it works? As we think of the Lord's goodness to us, we become good, and we become glad.

Will we be stiff-necked or shining old ladies? As we spend time listening and talking to God, we slowly know him better, we know our identity as his children, and we gradually become like our Father. "Those who look to him are radiant, / and their faces shall never be ashamed" (Ps. 34:5).

Proverbs 16:31 tells us, "Gray hair is a crown of glory; / it is gained in a righteous life." Gray hair is a sign of age. The crown is the reward for righteous living. I am not one of those women with beautiful gray hair that does indeed look like a crown, but this is not about hair color, is it? It refers to the reflected glory of the one who lives face-to-face with Jesus, seeking to know him better each day. One of my spiritual daughters calls it *the gospel glow*.

Our primary calling is to glorify God. All other callings are extensions of that. Our calling to be a daughter, employer, employee, wife, mother, single mom, widow, or old lady, our

calling to serve others or to suffer, is a calling to glorify God in that relationship or situation. The venue changes, but the calling remains the same. Often when a woman retires from her vocation or after her children leave the home, she feels useless because her purpose was centered on what she was doing rather than what she was becoming. The calling to glorify God transcends place, time, circumstance, and age.

Growing in Grace

There are many things we can no longer do as we age, but age does not keep us from fulfilling our purpose to glorify and enjoy God. An ever-growing knowledge of God's undeserved love—his grace—changes our motivation: "The love of Christ controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14). When our prayer is that his love for us will increasingly compel us to stop living for ourselves and to live for his glory, we will age with grace.

WORSHIP

Notice the psalmist's involvement in worship in Psalm 92. He gathers with God's people to hear the preaching of God's word, gives thanks, sings praises, and declares God's love and faithfulness. And God makes him glad. God is glorified when we are grateful and glad, because he is the source of these graces.

Charles Bridges, a nineteenth-century pastor in the Church of England, wrote, "Again and again must we be reminded that every motion must begin with God. . . . The

secret of Christian energy and success is a heart enlarged in the love of God.”³ So we pray:

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav’n, to earth
 come down:
 fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown;
 Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love
 thou art;
 visit us with thy salvation, enter ev’ry trembling heart.
 Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be:
 Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
 changed from glory into glory, till in heav’n we take our
 place,
 till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love,
 and praise.⁴

Growing in Grace

The more we know the triune God, the more we rejoice in our identity as his child and our purpose to glorify him. This knowledge results in worship that is transformative. God makes us glad. God fills us with joy. And this gladness and joy, this wonder and praise, do not diminish with age; they increase until we take our place in heaven.

I was in my late forties when my husband went on staff of a church with many righteous, radiant older women. Several

³ Charles Bridges, *Psalm 119: An Exposition* (1827; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 78.

⁴ Charles Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” 1747.

of them had attended and faithfully served that church all their lives. These women had watched their farmlands become neighborhoods and their rural church fill up with new people. They never resented these changes, and they lovingly welcomed the strangers among them. They flourished as they made us feel like family, and so did we. One of these women was Evelyn, who was in her eighties.

One day I visited Evelyn and poured out my heart to her. I was overwhelmed with life. I whined and grumbled. She listened and never interrupted me or rolled her eyes at my self-centered immaturity. Finally I asked, “What do you think I should do?” She was quiet for a few moments and then lovingly spoke life-giving words that soothed my soul. “As you talked, I kept thinking of one thing—Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Evelyn did not criticize me. She did not give me solutions. Her life and lips declared the steadfast love and faithfulness of Jesus based on the authority of his word. She did not minimize my story by telling me her story, but I knew her story and it gave tremendous weight to her words. Her mother died when she was four years old. Her daddy moved in with his mother, who cared for Evelyn and her three siblings, including her brother Ralph, who was mentally challenged. Before the grandmother died, she told Evelyn, “Take care of Ralph.” Evelyn’s husband died when she was sixty-three. She never had children, but she took care of Ralph, and she had a host of spiritual children.

Until she was bedridden in an assisted-living home, Evelyn was in Sunday school and church every Sunday always looking fresh and beautiful. Her gray hair was a crown of glory that was gained in a righteous life (Prov. 16:31). She lived to be a hundred. She disciplined me until she died, not by her words, because the time came when she could not speak, but by her grateful submission to God's word and his plan for her life.

How do we age with grace? Psalm 92:1-4, along with Evelyn's life and words, shows me that a worshiping, grateful heart becomes a glad heart that glorifies and enjoys God. The opposite is also true. A grumbling heart becomes a sad heart.

Lynda's Story

Lynda Tedeschi is a retired registered nurse and interior decorator. She has three children and seven grandchildren. She has taught women's Bible studies and lives in Newark, Delaware.

I was thirty-nine when my husband died of a rare lung cancer. It had been a difficult marriage because he had years of undiagnosed endogenous depression, but before his death God healed our relationship. I'm grateful for our last year together and that he is with his Savior.

Today I am almost seventy-five and married to a godly man, but soon I will be alone again. Andy has mesothelioma and is in hospice care. When I heard his diagnosis, I cried,

“Again, Lord?” My stepdaughter gently responded, “God prepared you to take care of my dad.” And she was right.

Since the death of my first husband, Jesus has shown me through his word the depth of my need for him and the sufficiency of his grace. Before I only understood saving grace; now Jesus has made living by grace a reality.

I survived my first marriage and the death of my husband by my own strength, repeatedly telling myself, “You can do this!” My heart was full of self-righteousness, pride, and a determination to survive on my own. Now, as I watch Andy die, I admit I am incapable of doing this alone; I need Jesus.

How does one flourish when the love of her life is dying? When Andy heard there was no treatment left to fight his disease, he exuded peace, knowing he would soon be with Jesus. As I slid into the abyss of disappointment and grief, terrified by the idea of life without my dear husband, I also felt the strong arms of Jesus holding me tightly. I soon realized flourishing in this place requires me to daily die to self. Every morning I wake up, not knowing if this will be my last day with Andy, and sorrow floods my soul. Then I fall at the feet of Jesus, knowing I cannot do this apart from his grace. Because I know him better, I rest in him, and the peace that passes all understanding washes away my fear. Jesus began a work in me many years ago, and in this season of life I am being completed in my suffering so I can minister to others who may be suffering. For now, God has called me to love and

care for my husband. Because of Jesus, I will not just survive this; I will flourish as I walk with Andy to the edge of heaven.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you learn about abiding in Christ from the following?

John 15:1-11

John 8:31-32

1 John 2:3-6, 28

1 John 4:13-16

2. Read Exodus 33-34.

a. In 33:18-19, when Moses asked to see God's glory, what did God say he would show him?

b. Make a list of the words God uses in 34:6-7 to describe his goodness. Ask the Holy Spirit to transform your character so you reflect these characteristics to others.

3. Which *Growing in Grace* principle is especially helpful to you at this point in your life and why?

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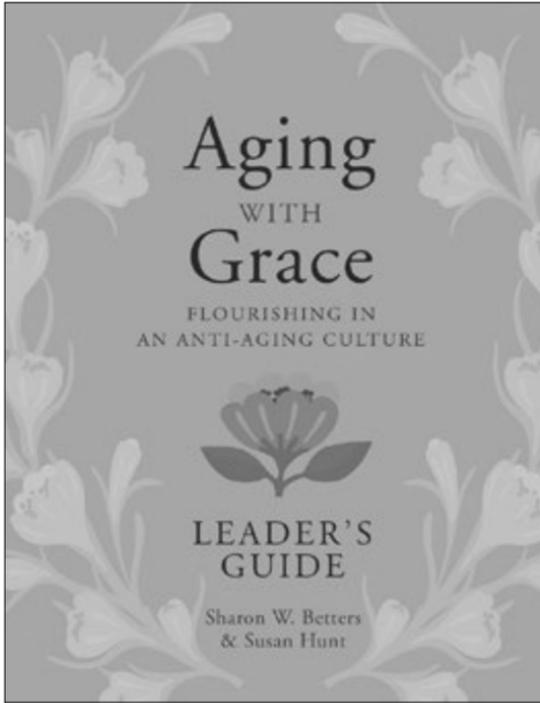
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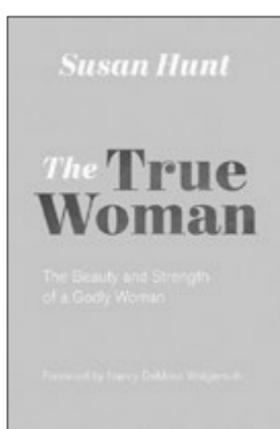
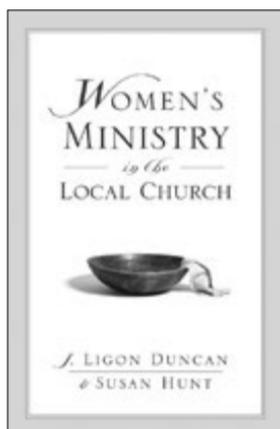
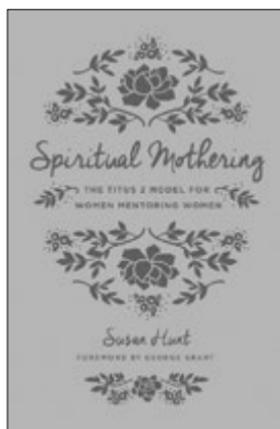
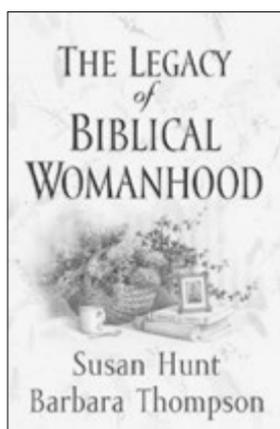
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GLENNA MARSHALL, author, *The Promise Is His Presence and Everyday Faithfulness*



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CHRISTIAN LIVING