

Keswick Convention 2025 - A transformed vision for retirement

Session 2 - Hitting the Wall: challenges, temptations and unexpected opportunities

Marathon runners say that it is the final stages of the race that can be the most challenging, and the most dangerous. Selfishness, fear, nostalgia, regret, resentment can all get in the way of our calling to faithful and fruitful living. What can we do now to prepare for coming challenges, and to look for unexpected opportunities and joys before we cross the finishing line?

“.....So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For our light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen, For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The challenges and temptations of the final lap

1. Fear and anxiety - 'what if...?'

Life experience teaches us that there is a great deal to be fearful about. We have watched many others suffer loss, illness and death. We have weathered deep waters on our own journey. We have wept and grieved. We anticipate future losses to come. We worry we may run out of money or suffer severe illness or develop dementia.

At one level anxiety for the future is entirely reasonable. We should have compassion on our fearful selves. There may be medical and psychiatric reasons for increased anxiety. And yet at another level fear about the future may be a spiritual issue. How much can we trust and rely on the goodness and faithfulness of God?

"Fear about what may happen is to imagine the future without Jesus in it, and that future does not exist." "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalm 34:8

Practising the discipline of hope.

2. Regret, resentment, bitterness - 'if only...?'

We are tempted to live in the past, to dwell on past failures, past sins, lost opportunities: the sins we have committed, the people we have hurt or failed, and those who sinned against us. We are trapped in the past.

We need to learn to practice forgiveness, to seek reconciliation where there are broken relationships, to daily trust in the grace and forgiveness offered in the Gospel, and to resist the accusations of the evil one. "If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything." (1 John 3:20)

"...Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ." There is a spiritual practice of 'forgetting' as well as 'remembering'.

Fruitfulness involves a focus on generosity and open-handedness now and hope for the future.

3. Nostalgia - 'it was much better then...'

We are trapped in a rose-tinted and largely imaginary past. Nostalgia is a perverted form of selfishness. It demonstrates a lack of concern for the future and for those who need us here and now. It may seem harmless but it is a seductive trap.

4. Selfishness - 'look after number 1....'

'We have worked hard and struggled most our lives. We've tried to serve others. Now is the time to relax and enjoy ourselves. We've earned it.'

Contented selfishness is another seductive trap of the evil one, particularly for the Baby Boomer generation who have often done well financially. But selfishness runs in exactly the opposite direction of generous fruitfulness. It replaces the open-handed attitude of sharing the resources and blessings that God has given to us, with the closed grasp of selfishness. The generous person gives away and yet grows and flourishes in the continuing goodness of God. The selfish person holds on to what they have, and shrivels and withers from the inside.

"To become rooted and grounded in God is to die to other possibilities of self-determination"
Christopher Chapman

Late-autumn: moving into dependence

As we move into the season of late-autumn, of *dependent fruitfulness*, we need to learn more about the gift of receiving from others. Open hands are ready to receive as well as to give. But when we allow another person to give to us we become vulnerable.

What makes this possible is the prior movement of opening our hands in generosity to others. Then we are ready to open our hand to receive care and love from others. The recognition that everything is pure gift.

This is God's way of fruitfulness and growth. The way of Jesus of Nazareth. This is part of the unexpected opportunity of dependence. The deeper we go into God, the more we are becoming the person we were meant to be. We take up our cross and follow Christ, but we do it from the discovery of our true self in fruitfulness.

"There is an essential humility that makes us willing to be served. Christians should have learned at the time of their salvation that they can do nothing to save themselves but are totally dependent on God. Throughout life a desire for self-sufficiency can impair spiritual growth. At the end of life, it is good to be less self-sufficient and trust God more fully." John Dunlop

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11

Joy and suffering are not opposites in the Christian life. In fact they are often closely related. Tears of joy and tears of grief take us into the very heart of God himself.

Gratitude

"When I can pray no other prayer but 'Thank you', it keeps me earthed in God's goodness. I am delivered from my grumpiness and can see the largeness of life again."

Thankfulness, an increasing appreciation of God's goodness and personal humility are special marks of the Spirit's work in older people.

Some resources

The Final Lap: Navigating the transitions of later life. John Wyatt, 10ofthose

Dying Well. John Wyatt IVP

Hope in the face of suffering. Jeremy Marshall, 10Publishing

The Stature of Waiting, William Vanstone, DLT

Thinking of You: the spiritual care of people with dementia. Joanna Collicutt, BRF

Dementia: Living in the memories of God. John Swinton, SCM Press

More resources at johnwyatt.com email: profjwyatt@gmail.com