

Sister Barbara B. Smith

Relief Society General President

Sunrise, sunset—swiftly fly the years. . . ." (From *Fiddler on the Roof*, 1964.)

Those lines from the poignant song bring a memory of two friends who, like the father and mother portrayed in *Fiddler on the Roof*, did not "remember getting older." The man was about sixty-three and the woman fifty-five. Both were healthy, happy, and employed in work they enjoyed.

One day the man was told he must take an immediate retirement. On the Monday morning the retirement took effect, the husband watched his wife prepare to leave for work. He realized that he would be home alone with nothing to do. He had no occupation, no hobbies, no special interests, and no plans for the future.

As he followed his wife to the door that morning, he exclaimed in anguish, "What's going to happen to me? What can I do?"

What, indeed, was there for this man to do, who one day was at the peak of his career and the next day was classified among the elderly unemployed? He was left to try to find a new life for himself or to vegetate and die. Sadly I add that within a brief time he did die.

Now there are those who would say that this crisis in the lives of my friends was inevitable. This, of course, is true. Aging is a natural process.

Preparing for old age

President N. Eldon Tanner has counseled: "People of all ages must realize that one day they could be old. . . . A time for which we should all prepare." ("Preparing for Old Age," *EN-SIGN*, Dec. 1976, p. 4.)

Many different circumstances and factors affect the quality of a person's life in the later years. But there is a corollary between preparing for old age and enjoying it when it comes. We are

told in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear." (D&C 38:30.)

May I suggest a few preparations?

Develop good attitudes

First, we can begin now to develop good attitudes toward the later years. We can learn to respect the wisdom, experience, and value of older people. We can strengthen our family ties and appreciate the assets of many generations in a family: the children, youth, adults—including the elderly.

With careful planning, a family can have loving, rewarding experiences in caring for its elderly members. There is no better way to teach children respect for the elderly and the need for everyone to prepare for that time in life than by helping to care for their older relatives.

Financial preparedness and service

Second, we can practice the principles of financial preparedness by living within our means and saving for the time when our earnings cease.

Third, we can make service to others a lifetime habit; the older years may bring even more time for service as the hours once devoted to earning a livelihood or rearing a family can be used to enrich the lives of others through church and community service.

We can also enrich our own lives by learning new skills after our full-time occupation has relaxed its demands. Learning should be a lifetime pursuit.

Health

Finally, good health practices pay important dividends in later years. Our physical health can be enhanced when we keep the Word of Wisdom, eat a

well-balanced diet every day, practice good dental hygiene, control weight, get adequate sleep and rest, maintain a physical fitness program, and adhere to medical procedures which insure a healthy life.

Example

Some who reach retirement age seem to feel, "I've done my share. Now it's someone else's turn." But withdrawal, according to gerontologists and others who work with the aging, can actually hasten the aging process.

My Aunt Martha is soon to be ninety-five years of age. I'd challenge almost anyone to keep up with her. There seems to be no end to what she finds to do. She attends civic meetings. She studies her Church lesson assignments and makes appropriate contributions to classroom discussions. In a time of need, she is the first one to render compassionate service. I've heard many people say that the bowl of hot soup she brought was just what they needed. Was it the food or the loving concern which was special?

Sisters in her visiting teaching district know she will be there early in the month. She attends two or three sessions each time she goes to the temple. She keeps current her genealogical records, helps with the housework and gardening.

But I think her greatest joy is missionary work. She filled a mission in Southern California when she was seventy-five years of age, and since then I don't suppose she has let a single opportunity to share the gospel pass her by. She loves and is loved. She is grateful for life and lives each moment fully.

Priesthood and Relief Society leaders must be aware of the great potential of those like Aunt Martha who are in their later years and can give useful service. Besides the traditional assignments for the elderly, we suggest substitute-grandparenting; teaching in mini-classes such skills as knitting, crocheting, gardening, breadmaking, and

quilting, or other skills which younger women often need to learn. They might read to the visually handicapped, compile family and ward histories, write letters for those who need such help, or teach those who wish to learn to read or write.

A wonderful world of service may emerge for those with time and skills to offer!

Caring for dependent elderly

So far, I have been speaking about the independent elderly, but there are many aged people who are dependent. Some are partially bedridden; others are senile or physically incapacitated. These older people must not be neglected. Some may be adequately cared for in their own homes with the aid of such services as meals brought in to them each day, housekeeping, shopping, out-patient medical services, and a daily telephone check, while other older people need twenty-four-hour care and attention. Often, even though families give this loving care to the elderly, they and the elderly need supportive services from others.

Relief Society and priesthood leaders should be particularly aware of the needs of these families and their elderly members.

The dependent elderly need the kindness and the attention of loving friends and visiting and home teachers. A busy mother in a home may need a few hours' respite from the constant care of an older person, just as a young mother does from the constant care of young children. Relief Society Assigned Compassionate Service could be a natural response to this need.

There may be times when the medical and physical needs of the aged can only be met by institutional care. When this is necessary, Relief Society and priesthood leaders may assist family members by helping evaluate the appropriateness of the institution.

And after a family member enters a health care institution, the family and

the Church need to continue their supportive interest with regular visits and expressions of love. Visiting teachers, and, where appropriate, special nursing-home Relief Society sessions, can be a blessing to sisters in such institutions.

Church members will be led to a greater understanding of their responsibilities regarding the aged if a stake uses the new BYU film production *The Mailbox* as the focus of a discussion on the needs and contributions of its elderly members.

Compassionate spirit

When the time of old age comes upon us—and it surely will, for “swiftly fly the years,” as the song says—we need to come to that time with a courage born of faith and of preparation. Underlying all we do for ourselves and for our own, we must remember the

aged with the compassionate spirit of Christ in whose work we are engaged.

May the cry of the psalmist ring in our hearts:

“Cast me not off in the time of old age;

“Forsake me not when my strength faileth.” (Ps. 71:9.)

I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

Sister Barbara B. Smith, General President of the Relief Society, has just spoken to us.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, a President of the First Quorum of the Seventy, will now address us.

He will be followed by Bishop Victor L. Brown, the Presiding Bishop of the Church.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle

Of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy

One day in South America we had the interesting experience of seeing in a hot jungle area a small brownish gray animal hanging upside down in a tree. It had rather long front paws and short back legs. Its movements were so slow that it was hard to know whether it was alive or dead. We were told that it was a sloth. I was intrigued because reference to the sloth appears in scripture. The Lord used it with disdain, referring to those who were slow to act.

Remove curse of idleness

When the welfare program was begun in the 1930s, it aimed to eliminate the curse of idleness, reestablish self-respect, and help people to help themselves. The basic principles of the Lord's economic system had earlier

been revealed to the Prophet Joseph. Nearly everything that has happened since then has been to prepare us for the time when this program would be needed to a far greater extent. In the intervening years, many great principles have been declared. I shall review these briefly.

President Grant declared: “The Church needs blessings, and the only way we can receive . . . them . . . is by keeping the laws on which these blessings are predicated. The fundamental law pertaining to the welfare of our people is fast offering. The reason we want to stress the paying of fast offerings is because we need blessings that come from paying fast offerings.”

President Clark counseled: “Live within your means. Get out of debt. Keep out of debt. Lay by for a rainy