

***Question: I am concerned about the way many old people are being forgotten and neglected in our world today. What would Jesus do?***

Some other cultures hold older people in high esteem, but our American culture seems to idolize youth with its beauty and strength. Even though the number of Americans over the age of sixty-five is increasing at a higher rate than other age groups, many of our older citizens are being made to feel marginalized, unwanted and un-needed.

In contrast, Jesus would remind us that God calls for us to “rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God” (Leviticus 19:32). One time Jesus quoted from the Ten Commandments saying: “For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus, you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (Mark 7:10-13; cf. 1 Timothy 5:1-3).

The Bible also recognizes that advancing age brings challenges as health begins to break down and places previously unknown limitations on the elderly (2 Samuel 19:32-35; Ecclesiastes 12:1-5). In a changing world that is moving faster and faster, the elderly are moving slower and slower. These limitations are difficult to accept, and the necessity of help is sometimes resented as a sign of losing one’s independence. Unlike the earlier generation in which our elderly grew up, families do not always live in the same town and provide care for older parents, uncles and aunts in their final years. Children and grandchildren living far away may be unaware of the needs of their elderly parents, as well as forgetful and neglectful of them. The death and growing incapacity of their friends as they age may result in loneliness and depression among older people. However, many elderly people have been able to retain good health and remain productive even with the difficulties that come with aging.

Instead of living separate lives, the young and the old need to be brought together with mutual respect, love and compassion. They need one another. When we allow a generation gap to develop, both the young and the old lose something. For example, children should be taught to love their grandparents, to spend time with them and to hear the stories of their own heritage. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of the elderly affords each generation the opportunity to avoid repeating the same mistakes and having to re-learn everything. The elderly are also enriched and encouraged by interaction with the young. As young adults minister to the elderly, they can learn how to be compassionate, patient and kind. While some people in our world might be willing to cast aside or even euthanize the elderly as no longer useful to society, followers of Jesus value human life and will do all possible to preserve it as long as God allows. The way the children of today see their parents treating the elderly is the way they will most likely treat their own aging parents.

I believe Jesus would call for a renewed respect and compassion for the elderly. He would call for the young and the old to come together more often, instead of socializing only with groups of people their own age. Both groups need to listen to one another, love, respect and bless one another. “This is what the LORD says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. . . Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there’” (Zechariah 8:3-5).

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12<sup>th</sup>, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: [www.nchrist.org](http://www.nchrist.org) ]      2014/07/25