

“Patina”

*“Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a **pure heart**, a **good conscience**, and a **sincere faith**” (1 Timothy 1:5).
Responsive Reading, “Patina” (2020) ¹*

George, age 92, and Jane, age 89, were really excited about their upcoming marriage. On an afternoon stroll to discuss their wedding plans, they happened to pass their neighborhood drugstore, and George went in to speak to the manager.

“We’re about to get married,” George said, smiling. “Do you sell heart medication?”

“Of course we do,” the manager replied.

“Well, how about medicine for rheumatism, arthritis, and osteoporosis?”

“Yes, we have all kinds.”

“Do you have supplies for hearing aids and dentures?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How about eye drops, sleeping pills, Geritol, and Ensure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Do you sell walkers, canes, and wheelchairs?” George persisted.

“We have all kinds and sizes,” the manager answered, “but why are you asking all these questions?”

George smiled proudly and announced, “Well, then, we’d like to use your store as our bridal registry!”²

When Elizabeth Sphar’s grandson asked her how old she was, she teasingly replied, “I’m not sure.”

“Look in your underwear, Grandma,” he suggested. “Mine says I’m four.”³

So what does it mean to be a Senior Adult? One person said that senior adulthood is when everything starts to click . . . your elbows, your neck, your knees . . . ! Or, as Yoda famously observed to Luke Skywalker, “When 900 years old you reach, look as good you will not, Hmm?”

The reality is, of course, that “old age” is not a disease. For the most part, the Bible regards old age as a blessing:

“Wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to those who have lived many years” (Job 12:12).

“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31).

It is in this sense that I have called this sermon “Patina.” You’re familiar with patina, whether you know the word or not. For example, the green film that forms on copper as it oxidizes is a patina. That’s the primary meaning of the word, but this morning I want to use

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on August 30, 2020.

² www.preachingtoday.com, submitted by Peg Beukema, Nyack, New York.

³ Elisabeth Sphar, of Green Valley, AZ, “Kids of the Kingdom,” *Christian Reader*.

Webster's second definition: "a surface appearance of something grown beautiful, especially with age or use."⁴

The patina of this sort that I think of most often is that deep luster that develops on sterling flatware with age. New sterling is certainly beautiful and shiny, but old sterling, having experienced a good bit of wear and tear in service, is far more beautiful.

People are a lot like that. We start life beautiful and shiny, but wear and tear over the years produces a different beauty, a beauty far deeper and more real. My favorite description of this process is that given by the Old Skin Horse in response to a question from the Velveteen Rabbit:

"Real isn't how you're made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real, you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up, or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time—that's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges or have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."⁵

Did you know that patina is actually described in the New Testament? Paul described it like this: "*But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). I want think briefly with you this morning about how our lives gain such qualities, about how we develop "patina," how we "become real."

We come today to the first of Paul's letters to Timothy, his protégé, his "son in the faith." Paul's second letter, which we'll consider next week, is the last thing we have from Paul prior to his execution in Rome about A.D. 67.

First Timothy was probably written about A.D. 64 while Paul was on a missionary journey between his two Roman imprisonments. He had expressed the desire to travel to Spain for to begin churches there, but we don't know whether he succeeded in that or not.

Paul's letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus are called "The Pastoral Epistles," because Timothy was pastoring in Ephesus and Titus was pastoring on the island of Crete when Paul wrote to them. While there are many things that might claim our attention in 1 Timothy, I'm going to focus this morning on just one verse:

*"Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a **pure heart**,
a **good conscience**, and a **sincere faith**" (1 Timothy 1:5).*

⁴ As you may know, this word is generally pronounced "put-TEE-nuh" in the U.S., "PAT-n-uh" elsewhere. You probably also know what it is.

⁵ Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, 1922.

And using the idea of “patina,” we’re going to consider this verse as “Patina in Three Tenses,” those tenses being the past, the present, and the future. Another translation puts 1 Timothy 1:5 in this way: *“The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.”*

“A clear conscience” has to do with the **past**; “a pure heart” has to do with the **present**; and “genuine faith” has to do with the **future**. I’m going to suggest one word—among many that might be suggested—for each of these tenses: for the PAST, “**forgiveness**”; for the PRESENT, “**blessing**”; for the FUTURE, “**anticipation**.” So here we go

When I think of “a good” or “**a clear conscience**,” two things that come to mind are those two things around which each of us organizes our lives, whether we know it or not. As I’ve told you many times, it seems to me that everything you and I do—*everything*—is designed, consciously or unconsciously, to secure **A Life that Matters** and **Relationships that Last**.

Our sense of “conscience,” whether “good and clear” or “dark and painful,” has to do with how well we’ve done in those efforts across the years of our lives. Have we invested our time, effort, and resources in things that genuinely matter? Have we so lived with persons close to us that our trail of relationships is both durable and nourishing? Or have we largely wasted the choices and the relationships that were made available to us?¹

The wonderful news of the Gospel is that *“when we were dead in trespasses . . . [God] made us alive in [Christ] and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and [took] it away by nailing it to the cross!”*⁶

Whatever brokenness we have in our past, God is willing and able to heal, to repair, and to forgive that brokenness and to restore us to wholeness.⁷ The Good News of the Gospel is that God’s grace can allow us to have a clear spirit with the person we see in the mirror.

God’s grace can give us the ability to forgive ourselves. God’s grace can give us the ability to forgive those who have wounded us. And God’s grace can give us the courage to ask forgiveness from those we have wounded. Such forgiveness is usually a process, not an instantaneous change, but it is possible, and it is real. If such forgiveness is a need in your life, I’d be glad to talk with you about that.⁸

Well, if “**a good conscience**” has to do with our past life, “**a pure heart**” has to do with our present life. How are we pursuing “*A Life that Matters*” and “*Relationships that Last*” in the present? One of the central questions for senior adulthood, then, might be asked this way: “What is the task God has for me as a Senior Adult, a follower of Jesus who has become REAL?”

As our physical powers wane, we may be tempted to get up on the shelf and get out of the action, to withdraw from the battle. But the Bible urges us not to *“get tired of doing what is good. Don’t get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time”* (Galatians 6:9).

Maybe it will help to remind ourselves that Moses began a new and world-changing career when he was 80 years old. Immanuel Kant wrote one of his best works at 74. Verdi

⁶ Colossians 2:13-14

⁷ 1 John 1:9

⁸ A wonderful resource for such a journey is Keith Miller’s *A Hunger for Healing: The Twelve Steps as a Classic Model for Christian Spiritual Growth*. You can get it on Amazon.

composed *Ave Maria* at 85. Michelangelo completed the *Pietà*, often considered his best work, at 87. Morgan Freeman is one of the best-known actors in the world at 83. Maya Angelou gave 80 lectures a year in her 80s. Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa at 76; and of course, President Trump is 74 and Joe Biden is 77.

My friend, if you're still breathing, God still has work for you to do! And if you are a Senior Adult, as I certainly am, let's think of ourselves not as "old" but as "vine ripened":

¹² But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. ¹³ For they are transplanted to the Lord's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴ Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green (Psalm 92:12-14).⁹

While each of us is called to serve God through all the years of our lives, every generation has its time "on center stage," those years in which we have the most influence and the greatest opportunity to shape church and community life. One of the graces of the senior years is that of offering blessing and encouragement to those whose time it is to "carry the ball" and "steer the ship."

Both of my parents were leaders in their churches across all the years of their lives. When they became physically unable to do much except attend worship, it was a beautiful thing to see how intentionally they nurtured and blessed the generations after them.

From time to time, as Mom reflected on what the church leadership was doing in those years, she'd make a comment sort of like this: "They're doing some things that I'm not so sure about, but I've had my time on center stage. They're doing the best they can. And it's not about me, anyway."

While there are many things we Seniors can do to build up the church in our Autumn years, a very important thing we can do is to bless and encourage those who are carrying the ball right now. Look for ways to be an encourager!

Well, as usual, time gets away. Let's turn to "**sincere faith.**" One of the advantages of advancing age is that we can produce mature fruit—fruit ripened and refined in the process of following Jesus. **The central issues of the second half of life are all spiritual issues;** and if we have walked long with the Lord, we can begin to see ourselves and our world through the perspective of eternity.

Renowned surgeon, Paul Brand, offered just such a perspective when he wrote these words: "I well remember when I was at my physical peak. I was 27 years old and had just finished medical school. A group of friends and I loved mountain climbing, and we could climb for hours. For some people, life is over when they cross that peak.

"I well remember my mental peak, too. I was 57 years of age and was performing groundbreaking hand surgery. All of my medical training was coming together in one place. For some people, life is over when they cross this peak.

"I'm now over 80 years of age, and I recently realized that I'm approaching another peak—my spiritual peak. All I have sought to become as a person now has the opportunity to

⁹ See also John 15:1-17.

come together in wisdom, maturity, kindness, love, joy, and peace. And I realize when I cross that peak, life will not be over; indeed, it will have just begun.”¹⁰

Maybe this is what Robert Browning had in mind when he wrote, “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand, who saith, ‘A whole I planned. Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!”¹¹

Intimate conversation with the Father is one of our greatest blessings as believers. As we learn more and more of our Father’s heart, our prayer becomes more congruent with God’s eternal purposes, and our prayer becomes more powerful.

So it is that as our physical powers fade, our spiritual powers can increase. Use this power and the time you now have available to pray for God’s Spirit to be released among us and in our town. Pray for God’s work among the youth of Oakland Mills. Pray for our staff and for our congregation. Pray for the work of the Kingdom in every corner of the world. Pray on!

And so it is, my friends, that no matter how many times we’ve “lived around the calendar,” God still desires to embrace us, to forgive us, to use us, until, no matter what life is or has been like for us, we become absolutely persuaded that God IS Love, and that God IS Trustworthy. As that happens, God transforms our minds little by little so that we think and understand more and more as God does. God transforms our hearts so that our yearnings and affections become more and more like God’s own.

And so we come back to “patina,” the Divine Patina of wisdom, serenity, peace, and Hope. **The Patina of Christ is not just beautiful. It’s radiant!**

My friends, our PAST is filled with **forgiveness** purchased by the Blood of God the Son. Our PRESENT is filled with the Encouragement and Blessing of God the Spirit, which allows us to offer **blessing** and encouragement to others.¹² And by God’s Grace, we are able to **anticipate** a FUTURE in which we will celebrate the Love of God the Father . . . *forever!* May those who come behind us find us faithful!

We’re pilgrims on the journey
Of the narrow road
And those who’ve gone before us line the way
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary
Their lives a stirring testament to God’s sustaining grace.¹³

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses
Let us run the race not only for the prize
But as those who’ve gone before us
Let us leave to those behind us
The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
May the fire of our devotion light their way
May the footprints that we leave
Lead them to believe
And the lives we live inspire them to obey
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful!*

¹⁰ Steve Moore, “A Graceful Goodbye,” *Leadership* (Summer 2002), p. 42.

¹¹ This is the first stanza of Browning’s poem, “Rabbi Ben Ezra.”

¹² 2 Corinthians 1:3

¹³ “Find Us Faithful,” by Steve Green.

ⁱ It was such considerations as these that caused my Dad to frequently quote these words from the poet Edgar Guest to my brother and me:

I have to live with myself and so
I want to be fit for myself to know.
I want to be able as days go by,
always to look myself straight in the eye;

I don't want to stand with the setting sun
and hate myself for the things I have done.

I don't want to keep on a closet shelf
a lot of secrets about myself
and fool myself as I come and go
into thinking no one else will ever know
the kind of person I really am,
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.

I want to go out with my head erect
I want to deserve all men's respect;
but here in the struggle for fame and wealth
I want to be able to like myself.

I don't want to look at myself and know
I am bluster and bluff and empty show.

I never can hide myself from me;
I see what others may never see;
I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself and so,
whatever happens I want to be
self respecting and conscience free.