

*“The days of our years are three-score and ten,  
or even if by reason of strength*

**FOURSCORE YEARS,**

*yet is their pride only labor and sorrow;  
for it is soon gone, and we fly away.”*

Moses was melancholic in reviewing the sentence God had placed on Israel to wander so long in the wilderness for no apparent good cause. Life there seemed in vain (Psalm 90:9-10).

In a depressing review of man’s activities on this earth, Solomon, in *Ecclesiastes*, also saw futility and lack of meaning. He was looking at earthly existence which must end in death, even if a person’s life is extended to eighty years.

Although I have always taken for granted that I would reach the fourscore mark, I did not think it would happen so quickly! Now I see images of myself in the picture Solomon painted in the last chapter of *Ecclesiastes*. Here is my version of it.

*“Remember also your Creator while you are still young before the dismal times come when you will say the things gave pleasure offer no more enjoyment for you. Do that before your failing eyesight dims the sun and the light of the moon and the stars, and clouds of depression follow the rain of tears. Then the hands and arms, the keepers of the house will tremble and the strong men, the legs, will become bowed, and chewing will be difficult because of so many missing teeth, and the eyes that look out the window will be darkened.*

*Because you will become more reclusive, the doors to the street are shut. You will eat soft food because of bad teeth. In sleeplessness, you will be ready to get out of bed at the early crowing of the rooster. You shall have lost your voice and ear for music. You will no longer climb ladders for fear of falling, and even walking outside will present danger. Your head will be as white as an almond tree in bloom. Minor things will become burdensome. Favorite foods will no longer taste good. Because your time of departure to your everlasting home is so imminent, you see those persons about you who will be at your funeral. The silver cord of life will be snapped soon, perhaps by a stroke, a heart attack, or kidney failure. Then the flesh, being made of this earth, shall return to it, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it. Futility of futilities, says Solomon, the Preacher.”* Ecc. 12:1-8)

As a teenager, I read *Ecclesiastes* several times and memorized portions of it. Solomon’s dismal philosophy impressed my young mind, no doubt, because of the austerity of my childhood and youth. It helped give perspective to my life.

**My Introduction To Life**

Thirteen days after the armistice was signed ending World War I, on November 24, 1918, I landed on planet earth in Fort Worth, Texas. Shortly after my birth, the family moved back to Rochester, a town only twelve years old, 65 miles north of Abilene. Dad cleared the virgin soil of the rented farm of its mesquite trees. I remember seeing tracts of good land still untouched by the axe. There was no paved road in Haskell County or in the great surrounding area. The farmers were beginning to buy Model T Fords, all black in color, but some wagons and buggies were still used for transportation. Those cars had no battery, generator, or starter; the gas tank was under driver’s seat, and flat tires were repaired by the roadside.

This was before farmers had telephones, radios, ice boxes, electricity, and indoor toilets, and few had piped water. This was before plastic, synthetic fibers, ball point pens, zippers, oleo, milk cartons, prepared foods, sliced bread or bacon or cheese, potato chips, prepackaged foods, frozen foods, antibiotics, detergents, anti-freeze, effective insect killers, trousers without cuffs, and slacks or shorts for women. The doctor came to your house with his assortment of drugs in his leather bag, and charged \$1.00. A letter was mailed for three cents and a postal card for one cent. The main reading material in many homes was a King James Version of the Bible and the Sears-Roebuck mail order catalog.

Everybody in our family shared in both the house work and the farm work. School aged children worked, and pre-schoolers watched after the tiny ones while mother worked. Work was never-ending. Except for school time, the entire family always ate every meal together and the family was always together for work or play. In the fall children from the farms attended school mostly when it was too wet to gather cotton.

We two boys and our three sisters were raised in an unpainted, boxed house of three rooms 14' x 14' in size. No closets or porches. We were teenagers during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl days of the Southwest. Men would work from sunrise until sunset for \$1.00 per day – if they could find a job at all. We kids probably had two or three soft drinks each but never ate a hamburger or a meal in a café before we graduated from college. But we were not the only ones without money. The farmers survived by raising and preserving their own food, and they shared with those who had less. In their pride and integrity, farmers disdained government hand-out programs initiated by Roosevelt. Our houses were not locked. No, extreme poverty did not make preying criminals of my generation. It took the breakdown of the home and desertion of moral standards to produce that in this generation. The school teacher was respected. It was rather customary that, if a kid got a spanking at school, he had a worse one waiting when he got home. Homosexuality was not mentioned, divorce was a disgrace, and pregnancy out of wedlock was a shame for all the family.

In spite of despairing poverty, we lived in hope! In church we sang of heaven, a thing below our present sophistication. All five of us children went to Abilene Christian College with practically no help from home. Some gained advanced degrees. We and our spouses became preachers, missionaries, and school teachers. We owe so much to the selfless teachers at the college who worked with meager pay during that desperate time for the college. Garvin Beauchamp was a fellow-freshman, Don Morris taught us freshman speech classes, and John Stevens was a senior.

### **Spiritual Influences**

Although Dad was a disciple and a man of highest integrity, his timidity never allowed him to lecture us, and the only prayers I ever heard him pray were when Mom sort of forced him sometimes to repeat his simple prayer of thanks for our meal. Mom was so restrained by “the silence of women” that she would not offer thanks. But she was our conscience with deep conviction, having been schooled in all the strictest scruples of our people. She instilled all those convictions in her children. Vulgarity and profanity, and even by-words, were never heard in our home. Sex was a gender, not an action, and there were no innuendoes about it in our speech.

Most of those convictions were reinforced by the “preacher boys” who came up from Abilene to fill the pulpit. They included Bill Price, Ben Newhouse, Otis Gatewood,

Leroy Brownlow, Clifton Rogers, Louie Welch, Alvis Bryan, and others. Our course was further refined by teachers at ACC.

The first record player I ever saw belonged to our neighbors. It was the spool-type record. In my high school years, we got a radio, but playing time was very limited. Gospel singing groups like the Stamps Quartet and The Chuck Wagon Gang sang in prime time. Much preaching could be heard. Neighbors visited, and religion was often a favored topic. It was common for people to sing gospel songs while they worked. The school taught no music, so we depended upon the churches who taught us in shaped notes. Since there was no other activity, revivals of the various churches were well-attended. The watchful eye of the neighbors in our small community helped everyone to live better!

Mom wanted her sons to be preachers, and the students from ACC helped to push George and me in that direction. So I became one of them, not because of communicative skills or speaking ability that I might have had, but more out of idealism. Due to the timidity that I inherited from my father which was never relieved satisfactorily, I never developed those aptitudes. Even to this day, I find it intrusive to approach a person or to call a person on the telephone. I have influenced more men to obey the gospel by playing volley ball with them than from “personal evangelism.”

### **A Believing Skeptic**

Would I have come to believe in God and Christ if I had not been raised in such a sincerely religious climate? Hypothetical questions cannot be answered. Surely, in being brought up in such a religious home and community, becoming a believer could have been little more than accepting my culture. On the other hand, my culture could have been the fertile soil in which spirituality could abound.

If you have read much of my writing, you know that I am always asking questions about accepted beliefs and practices. I have always thought of myself as a sort of *believing skeptic* or *accepting skeptic*. You may have a problem with that, but I don't. Truth and faith are refined by doubt. If we are afraid to question our faith, we are afraid of its weakness. There is more faith in honest doubt than in unquestioning acceptance of the time-worn creeds of men.

There is no facet of the teaching upon which our faith is built that can be proven factually. If you can know that Jesus died to atone for our sins, for example, then you have passed beyond faith into knowledge. However, our salvation is based on faith, not knowledge. We walk by faith, not by sight (that which is known by the senses). Faith is conviction based on evidences which fall short of proof. You may say you *know* you are saved because of logical deduction from Biblical teachings that you think you understand, but that is still inconclusive. And if you depend upon inner feelings for the “knowledge,” that is certainly only subjective evidence at best.

It is disconcerting to most of us to discard some belief in which we trusted. As layer after layer of misconceptions are peeled away, we are afraid that, like peeling an onion one layer at the time, we may soon have nothing left. Yet, if it can be peeled away, it is not of value to retain. Peeling them all away would leave us with the futility of which Solomon wrote. That is not an acceptable option..

There is a caution to be exercised in peeling the onion. Subjective “proofs” are no more acceptable as criteria for discarding a layer than for accepting one.

We can believe in God or we can believe there is only a material universe. Which is the most acceptable belief? The evidences of an intelligent source and designer are everywhere in every minute facet of science. I suppose my belief in a Creator depends more on contemplating the universe than reading the Bible. To admit that there is a material universe but deny that it had an intelligent power behind it is to claim to have definite knowledge even about what is not seen. Human intelligence and consciousness, limited as they are, are evidence that there is something more than the matter which houses it.

Belief in God offers something. Disbelief offers nothing – nothing except the overshadowing fear that maybe God does exist and expects recognition. Intelligent beings see no purpose, and only futility, without God. Even the noted American infidel, Robert Ingersol, conceded in his oration at his brother's grave, that in that night of death, hope sees a star, and listening ears hear the rustle of a wing.

### **Miracles In My Life**

Although there is overwhelming evidence of the unlimited presence and power of the Creator in the universe, it may not be so evident in our individual lives. He is not seen and heard like the world he created. There is a silence, and the silence of God is deafening, as someone has observed. I can feel with Job when he cried out, *“Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! ... Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand I seek Him, but I cannot behold Him; I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see Him. I am hemmed in by darkness, and a thick darkness covers my face”* (Job 23:3, 8-9).

There has been no time or incident in my experience where I could declare without question that God worked in a miraculous manner, that is, in a way contrary to the normal course and unquestionably free from coincidence or accident.

At the end of the spring semester in ACC, I had plans to leave in a few days with a group for a campaign in Utah. My plans for my future always looked westward. There were few available telephones on the campus but there was a pay phone at the corner business and post office across from the administration building. One day as I was passing within hearing distance, I heard someone call my name. Someone wanted to talk with me on the phone. With me? Who would it be, and how would they know to reach me there?

The call was from Harry Payne, of whom I had never heard, preacher for the South Park Church of Christ in Beaumont, Texas, of which I had never heard. Briefly, he explained that another ACC fellow was supposed to come as an assistant and to conduct his daily radio program while he was away in meetings that summer. The other fellow changed his plans. When asked if he knew someone to recommend, he mentioned my name. So, in less than a week I was in Beaumont because of one phone call from a stranger. It changed the whole course of my life, for I married there, and my ministry went to the southeast instead of the northwest.

Was that a miracle? I don't know, yet I am willing to give God the credit for it. I trust in the providence of God, though I cannot know if my decisions to act are always prompted by God or by temptation or misunderstanding. How can I know how many times He intervened when I was a child, or as a boy working teams in the field, riding steers and mules amidst the thorny mesquite trees and cactus and around barbed wire

fences, or swimming in the tank which drained from our barnyard, or living amid uncontrollable flies? I cannot know how many times he might have saved me from a collision while driving.

If we could know these things, little faith would be needed. Demonstration would preclude faith. In praising God for his providence, I must be aware that I could be actually praising him for my perceptions and my decisions based on them!

### **Like Father, Like God**

Will you be surprised or disturbed if I tell you that I have never felt affection toward God or Jesus, that I have never choked up or wept in thinking about them or their love for me? I have never had the affection toward them that I have toward my family and endeared friends. Is that a defect in me? If God demands feelings of affection, then I am a miserable failure.

In my childhood family we were, and still are, caring for one another. However, in our home life, I do not recall Dad ever telling one of us he loved us. Sometimes, in spite of chronic illness and emotional problems, Mom might express her love to us collectively. We kids never responded with expressions of love. As for us kids, there was no such expression between us though we were genuinely concerned for one another. We just were not the hugging and kissing kind. Though we rather feared some of Dad's rigidity of discipline, we all felt the security of our family relationship and never doubted his care. Our home was a safe haven.

Maybe the imprinted feelings toward my father and siblings were transferred to my feelings about God and my spiritual family. We each are imprinted by the world from which we came making it impossible for us all to react in the same manner.

Emotional love and fond affection cannot be brought about by command. However, we can each determine to hold good will toward God and fellow human beings. Those two things are commanded and are God's priority for us. He requires gracious interaction even with the people whose personalities hinder or prevent our affection. That is what practical religion is all about.

### **Unanswered Questions**

Does one become an atheist because he can ask unanswerable questions? I can ask my share of them. All intelligent believers have to deal with those questions.

I wonder about many things. I wonder why God does not make himself known unquestionably to each person on earth. Why would he depend upon a written message to reveal himself and his will? Most of the people who have lived since Jesus came did not have a Bible, and could not have read it if they had one. Those who read the Bible have difficulty understanding it, and they certainly disagree in the understanding. Why would God not simply reveal himself and his desires to each person in every generation? Why should a person have to depend upon others to bring God's message with their explanation of it?

I wonder also why God did not make his revelation more understandable. Great thinkers who gave themselves to lifelong study like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin failed to reach harmonizing conclusions. Such matters as the relation of faith and works, security of the believer and caution against falling away, election and choice, and many other vital issues have never been clarified and made consistent for me, at least.

Because I cannot answer such questions does not disprove the existence of God or mean that there is no answer. We must allow for his infinite nature and recognize his sovereignty which is beyond human comprehension.

Paul, a man of both intelligence and Spiritual guidance, concludes a review of God's working among his people with this doxology: "*O the depth of the riches, the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond our tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his adviser?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen*" (Romans 11:33-36). Must we not all add our 'Amen'?

In our search for systematic theology, we tend to overlook the simple answer that Paul gave us. In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul gives some answers that are generally discounted. He tells us that God has made his power and divinity known to each thinking person and has written his law on the heart of each person of good will. Every person on earth can know he should revere the almighty Creator and do good will to his fellowman. Our problem has been in trying to make that into a system of detailed patterns, forms, rituals, and sacraments to be authorized, administered, specified, and supervised by a religious system.

### **Religion Is Its Own Worst Enemy!**

Religions are based on the unseen. They involve the mysteries of spiritual beings and inexplicable happenings, all of which may be real or imaginary. There are the pagan concepts of controlling mystical forces like the sun, moon, stars, constellations, zodiac, horoscope, and scientific mysteries like thunder, lightning, and storms. These have been associated with high places, mountains, and the sky. This provides a fertile field for mystics, monastics, hermits, and persons with mental and emotional disorders to claim visions, revelations, seances, communication with the dead, memory of a previous existence, inspired oracles, and prophetic utterances. The effects on those who make such claims range from total debasement and privation to delusions of grandeur and power.

Much of religion is based upon fear, and its practice is an attempt to escape the wrath of an angry god by sacrifices of appeasement. Although this perverted concept was made a part of the Christian faith by the medieval church, Christianity reverses the pagan concept by depicting a benevolent God who offers a sacrifice for man in order to save and bless him.

Although religions have been inhibiting and oppressive generally, some have been licentious. There have been temple prostitutes, and pagan fertility rites have given license to sexual promiscuity. Sexual perversions have even been sponsored by Christian cults, and more accepted Christian groups which allow bigamy, promiscuity, and homosexual practices, or demand celibacy of others. Popular people like Oprah and Madonna become experts of theology upholding faith while living with men out of wedlock. Our President's disgraceful conduct is termed by many as a peccadillo, a slight offense.

Religions rule civil governments and civil governments persecute religions. Those supposedly crusading under the banner of God have felt divine approval and license to hate, slander, misrepresent, vanquish, rob, rape, torture, and kill those who oppose their religious views. "Holy wars" (what an oxymoron!) have been many, and

they still plague our world. When one is *so right religiously* in his own estimation, it becomes easy for that person to feel that he can show love to God by misrepresenting, hating, and destroying others.

Much of Christianity as we see it is like Half-and-Half coffee creamer. It is neither cream nor milk and cannot be labeled as either. It is less cream and more milk. What is paraded as Christianity is a homogenized mixture of Biblical truth and paganism, tradition, and imagination, with the former being the least ingredient.

Theologians and preachers have added to the confusing and unappealing image. Without being too judgmental, we can detect pride, greed, grasping for power, ignorant zeal, hollow cheer leading, emotional imbalance, and flawed characters both on the local level and on the networks.

The shameful defacing of the image of Christ in his church makes Christianity distasteful for many people, but it does not prove Christianity to be invalid. Christ does rule in the hearts of many sensible and devout disciples in spite of their group affiliations. They claim no perfection except as it is accounted to them by the grace of God. They are the salt of the earth still influencing the world to make it a better place. They do this by daily living more than by impressive rituals, attention-gaining works, and being the loudest and most insistent of their own correctness. Religion is a manner of life rather than a system of theology. It gives the only worthwhile and lasting meaning to life.

Even the cynic can find Micah's appraisal of the will of God appealing: "*With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Micah 6:6-8).

### **Jack Rabbits and Turtles**

At full throttle from the first leap, as the fable has it, the rabbit looks like a sure winner over the patient, plodding turtle, but he becomes a disappointment. On level ground he can elude most enemies if they give up at his burst of speed. On longer runs, however, his energy fades quickly. Once I saw a stubby-legged bulldog almost catch a jack rabbit in a chase of duration in a furrowed field. At the last moment, the rabbit reached the smooth pasture and regained speed to escape.

As I think back over the last sixty years, I recall many good men who were once the "hottest horse running." They had energy, charisma, and zeal to promote some phase of good work. Such men were sought after by churches to come for campaigns and seminars. They could influence and move people. They were specialists in evangelism, teaching "personal evangelism," organizing congregations, promoting missionary activity, teacher training, and such. Perhaps two or three men per decade were in the limelight. You saw their names in every journal.

Then, after a few years, you might ask, "Hey, where's *what's-his-name* these days and what is he doing?" That one had slipped out of sight, and attention was focused on other rabbits that had flashed into the lead. Each had his own familiar level ground, and when he had to get out into the furrowed ground of breadth and balance, his zeal began to fade. The patient and persistent turtle had not stirred up much dust but was ahead.

These men did great good. I do not want to be disrespectful of them. My aim here is to point out the need for the day-by-day religion that lasts a lifetime. No one can run at full speed all the time any more than his car can. To try to maintain maximum speed may be destructive for both car and driver.

Congregations can become dependent upon enthusiasts. They hire a man to come among them who promises to convert the community, to get them all going in high gear, and raise the spirituality and zeal of everyone to a pinnacle. After a few months or years, he runs out of his smooth terrain into the furrowed ground of business-as-usual. Those whose zeal was intensified by him may become frustrated and those who looked to the preacher as their remedy begin yearning for another jack rabbit. The preacher begins to dream of another congregation that will renew his zeal and join in his high-speed race. Our universities and seminaries (We may call them preacher training schools.) send zealous young men into the pulpits but little gain is made over the number leaving in discouragement.

The life of a disciple is a life-long marathon. The runner must set a pace that is practical, keep the goal in mind, and continually sustain a determination to run with patience the race that is set before him, looking to Jesus who the initiator and goal of our faith.

### **Half Empty or Half Full?**

We say the optimist sees the glass as half full while the pessimist sees it as half empty. Motivational people urge us to see the full part and always project the smiley face. That is good advice unless it is a denial of the emptiness that is there. The balanced life is realistic, seeing the good and the bad, the positive and the negative, life and death, happiness and unhappiness, etc. – the factors that we work through in life..

Solomon enumerated factors that we must consider in balancing our lives. *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace” (Ecc. 3:1-9).*

In this generation many go to counselors because they do not know how to deal with the negatives, the half empty part of life. It becomes easy to turn to self-gratification in denial of the emptiness. Countless persons who live in the empty part of life seek escape through constant distraction and entertainment, alcohol, and other drugs. Humor and laughter are vital in dealing with the shortcomings of life but they must not be a denial of them. Being able to laugh at one’s self is an asset.

Others live a life of quiet desperation. I have followed much of that route. Too much of life was spent in “temporary arrangement” while looking for better times which would surely come. It is like the struggling farmer who always thinks he will have a better crop next year or like the losing team thinking next year will be the winning season. We may live from paycheck to paycheck thinking easier times will come. That is the pitfall of credit cards, though I have avoided it. Instead of realizing that life is today,



we tend to think it will begin after this or that happens. There are job insecurities, family problems, relationship problems, health problems, and feelings of spiritual insecurity and guilt.

A person is not happy because of his race, age, where he lives, how much money he has, or whether he has solved all problems. “Those who wish to sing always find a song” (Lue Jenkins). The heart must be tuned for happiness by adjusting to and dealing with the realities of life instead of living in denial. I have sat at the bedside with many disciples who were terminally ill. Almost all of them are in denial that death is near. Few make mention of what to expect on the other side. With one such elderly woman, I talked about what to look forward to soon. It must of shocked her, for she made dramatic recovery!

The possibilities of our dealing with the positives and negatives are beautifully expressed in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s *Renascence*:

*“The world stands out on either side  
No wider than the heart is wide;  
Above the world is stretched the sky, --  
No higher than the soul is high.  
The heart can push the sea and land  
Farther away on either hand;  
The soul can split the sky in two,  
And let the face of God shine through.  
But East and West will pinch the heart  
That can not keep them pushed apart;  
And he whose soul is flat – the sky  
Will cave in on him by and by.”*

Happiness is not found in being pre-occupied constantly with increasingly exciting entertainment and the acquisition of the newest “toys.” Those can become numbing, boring, and unfulfilling while producing spiritual couch potatoes. The simple joys of relationship with family and friends, the feeling of peace with God, the satisfaction of worthwhile service, the quiet of solitude and meditation, and communing with nature can best fill life’s glass and enable us to deal with the remaining emptiness. Yet our present lifestyle gives little place for those things. Our attention is constantly bombarded on every hand by louder and more shocking demands for our minds.

On the farm my brother and I would move our bed outside for the summer and sleep under the stars. Due to the urban life of this generation, I suspect that few people are aware any more of the magnificence of the very sky above us. Although the farm life was not monetarily rewarding, it paid well in developing a love for, and closeness to, nature which can nurture meditation, awe, healing, and peace. William Wordsworth felt this and expressed it for us simply:

*“My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began;  
So is it now, I am a man;  
So be it when I grow old,  
Or let me die!*

*The Child is father of the Man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety."*

The insecure teenager wants to be different from the crowd -- by dressing and acting just like his/her peers! Snicker at that as we may, yet it takes most of a lifetime for many "grown-up teenagers" to outgrow that vanity. It has been called *keeping up with the Joneses*. You may wonder why the older set seems not as interested in the latest styles of clothing, the current trend in automobiles, or the most impressive houses. At last, they see the vanity of pretensions. They are no longer competing. William James observed, "To give up our pretensions is as blessed a relief as to have them gratified." Early recognition of that is evidence of early maturity!

Having loved ones and engaging in helpful, rewarding activities make life worth living. As long as we have these, we have a will to live. My concern about dying lies mostly in thinking of leaving Lea dependent upon others and in thoughts of leaving unfinished work. In high school I also was impressed with Keats' sonnet expressing those feelings. I memorized it.

*"When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,  
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,  
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;  
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;  
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!  
That I shall never look upon thee more,  
Never have relish in the faery power  
Of unreflecting love! -- then on the shore  
Of the whole world I stand alone, and think  
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink."*

The octogenarian is aware of the lengthening shadows and the failing of the light of day, but he has grown tired in the long day. He has thrilled at the brilliance of morning and basked and worked in the sunlight hours so that he is now weary and anticipates rest. Again, it was while in high school that I memorized William Cullen Bryant's advice:

*"So live that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan that moves  
To that mysterious realm where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."*

Solomon's concluding exhortation offers little cheer: "*Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into*

*judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecc. 12:13f). We who are privileged to access the grace of God by faith see beyond judgment and vanity and see the meaning of life fulfilled in eternity. And what could be more cheering?*

In the beginning of this platitudinous rambling, I had several things in mind which I have not covered too well. I wanted you to understand us older ones better for it may seem that we are from a different planet. It may reveal some of your social and spiritual roots. Perhaps, it may give you a more realistic perspective. Seeing our misdirections may make your path clearer. You may see need for more tolerance, and trust that God respects the diversity brought through our culture and spiritual climate.

I can remember when Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic in his single-engine *Spirit of St. Louis*. I have seen a shuttle that returned from space. I have been a guest in the home of Charles Duke who walked on the moon. You can understand why I may not fit too well now. Drastic change has been constant. You, too, may have to make as many adjustments to changes in your world lest you also appear as an alien from another planet.

Each generation has new issues to face which demand new thought and the abandoning of unduly limiting concepts. We tend to oppose what we do not understand. All change is not downhill. There are many good people in this world. Join them in making it better.

May God bless you with fourscore years of happiness in his service. []