

## Growing Old - By George Moore

**Prov. 15:15 "All the days of the afflicted *are* evil: but he that is of a merry heart *hath* a continual feast."**

This week I find myself testing a pair of hearing aids. The event has triggered in me what Longfellow might have identified as: "long thoughts". As a brief, perhaps lighthearted, departure from our intense week, I thought I might share some of these thoughts with you via an old essay that I wrote about 25 years ago:

"It seems to me that with respect to age, most people divide their lives roughly into thirds. I say "roughly" because the boundaries separating the sections are not fixed. The first "third" is youth. Generally, youths give no thought to these groupings. They have no concern for age in the sense that they regret the passing of life. They are fervent to be old enough to drive, to join the military, to obtain credit, or to legally do the things that they ought not to do at any age. They are eager to get on with it! So, they plunge ahead with their hairy heads, taut bodies, and bright prospects. I suspect that they are not concerned with other age "groups" because, if truth be known, they can't see them. Older people are like wallpaper to the young. They are background. The ideas of the "old" are irrelevant, their discipline is oppressive, and their bodies are kind of gray and wrinkly. If it were not for money supply issues, free room, board, and housekeeping, older people could be dispensed with altogether. I could find the heart to be stronger in my condemnation except that I used to be exactly as they are.

It seems that the first alert that the sand is running out of the glass comes with the advent of the second "third". We are wont to denominate this as "middle age". Anxiety related to aging came to me during this era. The threshold, at least for me, occurred at age thirty. This was a very difficult time. There was a heavy sense that doors were closing. While a youth all things are possible, but the coming of the thirties usually signaled that some aspirations simply were not going to be realized. For instance: I am a big person with no manifest athletic ability, yet I had always harbored the certainty that I could be an NFL lineman if I worked very hard and applied myself. That pleasant fantasy seemed to be slipping away at 30. So did the notion of being president of something or being otherwise rich and powerful. The hole that claims our dreams is deep and dark. Things that slip into it seldom come out again. Slippage starts at thirty.

As I progressed in "middleageness" I found myself calculating the reasonableness of my thinking of myself to be in this category. The calculation was simple:

$$\text{Current Age} \times 2 = \text{RLS.}$$

RLS, of course, stands for Reasonable Life Span. This led to all kinds of stretching. At fifty I "stretched" to conceive that I might reasonably live to be one hundred. Now at sixty I can no longer fool myself. I am in my "golden" years. When Willard Scott

recognizes those few “last leaves” during his segment on *Today*, I do not note any having reached the age of 120.

My entry into old age was not as traumatic or, for that matter, not as clean as the “turning thirty” experience. It was more gradual. The edges of the era were fuzzier. The transition was troubling but gentler. It began one Sunday morning at church. The pastor announced that one of the young families was moving and that they would appreciate some help. Who would care to volunteer? With several other young men, I raised my hand. I remember that there were eighteen of us. As the pastor pointed to each person he assigned a number, and spoke their name whereupon the hand was withdrawn. The two young men in front of me were numbers one and two. Those behind me were numbers three and so forth. My appendage was the last to fall and my number was eighteen. It was a little thing, but it bothered me. Why was I not number three? Small matter. I put my suspicions aside. We would each be called with specifics as the day approached. The camaraderie would be rich. We would do a bunch of guy stuff. We would probably scratch a lot and grunt. There would be sweat, lots of pizza. A good time!

Days passed and the confirming word did not come. Doubt began as a low-level thing with me - almost subliminal. Today the phone would ring. My dark nagging would abate. I would be restored. Silence!

I have too much dignity to inquire as to why I was left off the list. Still in my heart I know. These young people simply could not take the time for the occasional cardiac problem. They are too busy and self-absorbed to pause and call an ambulance from their fancy cell phones. Well, all right! Let them move without me. I’ll just stay right here on the couch and watch *Wide World of Sports*.

There are offsetting compensations. There is a sort of serene “quietness” at this end of the continuum. I look into my spouse’s eye, and I see resignation. This man for whom she had such high hopes will not achieve his potential. This one that she would have molded and made into a sanitary, polite, neat, and well-dressed man of the world is simply, well, what he is. The “molding and making” is definitely on the ebb. As I shuffle about the house, she beholds me with a benign tolerance. She has fought hard, but the victories have been small. It is enough for her, I hope, that she tried.

So that I should be deprived of the taste of final victory, she has continued the improvement wars on one remaining front. My driving has never entirely pleased her, and so she presses the battle.”

**Romans 13:11 ESV: ... salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.**

George Moore  
Elder Emeritus