

Testimony of Dr. Perry A. Bowers
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Promoting Healthy Aging:
Living Your Best Life Long Into Your Golden Years
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
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I want to thank Chairman Senator Casey, Senator Tim Scott, and the other senators who serve on the Special Committee on Aging for allowing me the honor of discussing the role of prayer, faith and spirituality in promoting a lifestyle of vibrant and graceful aging.

My name is Dr. Perry Bowers. I am thrilled to be accompanied by my beautiful bride, Janet, of 46 years. We are 68 and 70 respectively and together have two daughters and six grandchildren. I entered the University of Maryland in 1972 to become the world's greatest architect. However, God had other plans and has called me as a pastor to build the lives of men rather than building structures. For 30 years I have been the founder and president of Focused Living Ministries which teaches men across the state of South Carolina to focus on and live for Christ. Together we serve hundreds of men each week from their 20s into their 90s by helping them to become the husbands, fathers and servant leaders in their communities that God has called them to be.

I understand that there are many diverse, deeply held faiths represented today, so I will limit my remarks to the God of the Bible and His Son, Jesus Christ whom I have personally experienced.

God created us with a unity of *body, mind and soul (or spirit)*. The soul is most often neglected yet it should be the most important. It is the spiritual aspect of life that has the greatest impact in helping us to age in the most vibrant, healthy and satisfying way.

The spiritual aspect of aging shapes three vital areas of life: *Value, purpose and hope*.

Value: Perhaps the most important way a vital faith in the God of the Bible promotes vibrant aging is by declaring a person's *value*. We live in a society where value is often based on *performance, productivity, position* and the ability to enjoy *possessions*. With age we gradually lose each of these through retirement, declining health, or inability to function well.

My 93 year old father served 26 years in the medical field of the United States Navy and retired as captain. Until 75, faith, prayer, a church community or biblical life principles were not high priorities. To his credit, my father worked hard to excel in his performance as a doctor, to be productive with many activities, to chair several prestigious boards and to enjoy his possessions. He wisely realized that these good things could not be sustained and that they should not define a person's value. At that time his Creator graciously helped him understand that it was not enough to know about God, but to actually know Him in a growing relationship.

Through his new found faith he learned that real value was not based on his contributions, accomplishments, status or successes. His real value was that he was created in God's image and is valued by his Creator just as a father highly values his children apart from their performance. My father would be the first to share that the value assigned to him by God as created in His

image has been the single greatest factor in helping him to age with joy, peace, and patience rather than becoming calloused, critical or complaining while wishing for the better days of younger years. My father's days are now filled using his surgical skills in making intricate model ships to bless others, encouraging his great grandchildren and mentoring students in the medical field many of whom he taught 45 years ago. As age gradually removes the things upon which he formerly built his worth, his value before God remains secure.

An understanding that we are created in God's image gives us a value far greater than plants or animals. Our dignity and worth are sure even as our bodies erode, mental faculties decline, abilities diminish, and sense of societal contributions fade. When we understand our true value we can authentically love, esteem and treat with great dignity those who look, believe, live, act, think and vote differently than we do.

Purpose: Another way in which worship of God, prayer to God and faith in God dramatically impacts life as we age is *purpose*. God created us with an inherent desire to live for and invest ourselves in something that will outlive us. He wired us for eternity. I weekly talk to men in their 70s, who after a few months of retirement, crave to become involved in something much greater than their own lives. They consistently claim that no matter how fun the game of golf or how satisfying to clean their garage (for the 5th time) or how enjoyable it is to travel our country, serving a purpose greater than themselves by serving others is far more fulfilling.

My good friend, Dickie Butler is 81 and had a successful career as an executive with Blue Cross Blue Shield. Several years ago he began a relationship with the God of the Bible. He soon realized that following God was not keeping a list of rules but in growing a relationship. Over the past 4 years his mindset has changed from an "I got to" into a "I get to" attitude. He is busy now serving as a substitute elementary school teacher several days a week and mentoring young boys who need remedial help with math. In spite of arthritis and a hip replacement he is the fix anything handyman at his church. Perhaps he shines most shepherding younger men when they drift off course in life or forget their real priorities. Like a tireless border collie, Dickie gently yet energetically guides men to refocus on their families. He understands that a man wrapped up in himself makes a very small package. So he wisely chose to be *fulfilled* with God's life purpose rather than *fill* his life with things which don't matter. Motivated by God's purpose, the more he ages, the more energized he becomes as he invests his life in the next generation.

Hope: A last powerful benefit of a vibrant relationship with the living God as we age is a solid *hope*. Death is a fact of life as one out of one dies. The process of aging and dying can create a great deal of fear. God invites us to build a faith around His sure *character* rather than fear the *circumstances* we face. What gives the aging men I serve hope is that their faith is not in a philosophy called Christianity but faith in Christ. They reason that if Jesus historically lived, died, actually rose physically from the dead as promised and then presented Himself alive with overwhelming historical evidence, then there is real and eternal hope on both sides of the grave.

My 66 year old brother, Kenny, lives in Gaithersburg Maryland, married his Junior High sweetheart and they raised 3 wonderful children. For years she battled cancer and died. He later married Rachel who, after 5 years, also passed away from cancer. How has my brother overcome the fear of death and adversity which rip through his heart as he ages alone? What enables him to

be the most joyous, encouraging, positive, uplifting man on the planet? Kenny would say that actually talking to his living God in prayer about the crushing needs of others makes him so. Prayer gives him the right perspective he needs and a proper focus on God's character rather than circumstance. That is why he walks 7 miles a day praying for countless people who are facing cancer or severe adversity in their families. He even contacts my friends he has never met just to encourage them with the hope he has experienced in Christ in order to temper the hype to which they cling.

I could tell of many others whose hope in a living Christ has caused them to age vibrantly even when confronted with crushing circumstances. My pilot friend, Don (70) who soars above his fears though his 27 year old son died in a plane accident. Or Claire (75), whose hope in Christ brings joy and peace to others though her 74 year old husband died of Covid last month.

A God given value that brings dignity, an eternal purpose which yields a fulfilled life rather than merely a filled life, and a secure hope in an eternally physical life beyond the grave are just three of the real benefits of aging well that come from an authentic relationship with the living God.

Thank you for listening to my heart.