

After WWII ended (1945), a massive explosion occurred. No, it wasn't more nuclear testing – It was the birth-rate. And those who were born from the mid-1940's to the mid-1960's, are what's known as the baby-boomers.

- It wasn't just that all the soldiers were returning home and starting a family;
- And it wasn't just that the world could breathe easy, because the Germans were soundly trounced,,,

There was:

- a new age of prosperity, and it led to a massive increase in the number of children born;
- A new age in medical advances, meant a huge reduction in infant mortality; and
- continuing medical advances, have raised life expectancies markedly;

And so **now**, Western countries (which is where the baby-boomers are) have reached a place of crisis. The Baby-Boomers have largely moved out of working-age, and most of them are now retired... And so, we have seen a massive increase in service industries, to service retirees...

And now today (2022), the oldest of the Baby-Boomers are in their mid 70's. And so, over the next 10-30 years, there's going to be a massive spike in the number of people in our communities, who are in need of significant aged care.

Once again, advances in medicine, means that many who in the past, would've died of an acute illness at this age (Heart attack / stroke / asthma attack / infection / cancer / flu / covid) – in the past, an acute illness (that especially the aged are

vulnerable to), means **many** would've once died reasonably quickly, but these things are much more treatable now... And so, more than ever before, we're going to have a massive number of people who are going to need significant, long-term care, possibly for decades...

Now, the governments of western countries are very worried about this, because the attitude of most is, "It's the government's job to look after me." "I paid my taxes, therefore, they have to pay for my aged care"... And so, with the cost of aged-care ballooning, this is going to put a massive impost onto the generations who are currently working and paying tax.

So, that's a little lesson in demographics. Why are we talking about it today??? It's because the topic today, is about "caring for our family" (specifically, about caring for our aging family): Caring for our biological family, **and** caring for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ (caring for our Church family) as they age...

And so the message today, is relevant for every one of us, and it might be quite challenging for some of us... So, let's begin with prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Your church, is the community of faithful believers,
following You together.

We pray that, by Your Holy Spirit,
we would be a people,
who have an immense love for one another;
That we would be a people who care for one another,
because as we love Your children, we are loving You.

Lord, I pray that you would soften our hearts,
that we would become a people who give
(no matter what the cost is to ourselves)...

But we also pray that when it's required,
that You would give us a resolve,
to give 'tough-love'
to those who are shirking their own responsibilities
and leaching off of others.

And Lord, give us wisdom,
to know the difference.

And so, speak to us now, through Your word,
amen.

1 Timothy 5:1-16

Righto:

The Apostle Paul, is writing to Timothy, who is pretty-much fulfilling the role of "Pastor" in the church at Ephesus. But

we also realise, that the way this letter is written, it's not only instructions for "Timothy, the Pastor", it's also for the whole church – for us to hear and know and understand...

And as I read **this** section of the letter, I realised there's a couple of dimensions to this:

1. There's direction for the church, in how to provide care, and I'm going to summarise that with:

- Respect;
- Assess;
- Provide

2. But there's also direction for those who may be coming into a time of needing care, but it's actually broader than that – it's about "Godly living" for all of us.

And for these, I'm going to summarise with:

- **Self**-provision (where possible)
- Service (always); and
- Prayer;

Righto, so let's begin with the:

1. Directions for the church: Respect.

As the church, we are a family. We don't :

- belittle one another;
- look down upon one another;
- devalue people because we feel they've got nothing to offer...

As the family of Jesus, we love, honour, and respect each other.

And Paul reminds Timothy of this, The normal practice should be to encourage rather than rebuke;

Treat:

- an older man as we would our father;
- a younger man as our brother;
- an older woman as we would our mother;
- a younger woman as if they were our sister...

And he throws in an extra one here, Timothy, as a bloke, treat the younger women with all purity... Don't see them as possible liaisons, or as a buffet to select from... Treat them with all purity / as your sisters in Christ – these are holy women. That's what Godliness looks like.

Now, as we read our Bibles, both Old Testament and New Testament, it's pretty obvious, that God has a deep, deep concern for widows.

Why widows, and not widowers?? Do you know the difference? .

- A widow is a lady whose husband has died;
- A widower, is a man whose wife has died

Why the deep concern for widows, and not so much for widowers???

Now, a couple of decades ago, no one would've ever asked that question (it was well-known why widows were particularly vulnerable). But now, that might seem terribly

old-fashioned, because our modern society wants us to believe that **everyone** can be strongly independent and women don't need men...

But, in reality, traditionally (and this is still the case in most of the world today), the man has been the bread-winner... But even if he's not, (e.g. in my own household, Robyn is the main bread-winner...) Even if the man is not the main breadwinner, the fact of the matter is, God has designed men and women differently...

Men are stronger; and men and women are generally **wired** differently: We function differently; we do different things. And marriage is a partnership, where the husband depends upon the wife, and the wife depends on her husband... But while men are physically stronger, it's usually the women who live longer. *According to the chart I've got up there, in my age-group, that's where the biggest difference is, and so on average, a woman will live 5 years longer than a man in my age group.*ⁱ.

And for a woman, when the man whom she has depended upon for her whole married life, dies,,, and she's left all alone, all of a sudden, there's no one to take care of the things that her husband used to take care of...

Now of course, for different people, those things will be different. He might've been the one who:

- took care of the finances;
- did the heavy lifting;
- did the mowing / pruning / fixing stuff;

- knew stuff about cars and how to tell when they needed maintenance/new tyres...
- the cook;

Whatever the case, when her husband dies, there's no one to do the things he used to do.

And so Paul says, “Honour widows who are truly widows.” But, what does he mean by that??? Surely: “If a woman's husband has died, she's a widow”... Well yes, but **not** for the purpose of going on the list of widows that the church is going to provide for...

We don't have the resources to provide for everyone... *Not even the Taxation-funded welfare system can afford to provide for everyone, and that's why most benefits (in the welfare system) are means-tested.* And the church was means-testing, long before public welfare was ever even thought of.

Now, some folk aren't happy with that, and some feel “*It's only fair if everyone gets treated equally, and everyone receives the same benefits*”... Not so. It is obscene, for charity to be given to the rich,, which is why, as a church, we are generous to those who are **truly** in need.

So, when it comes to widows, how does the church know if this is someone **we** need to provide for???

i) Firstly, it's someone who has no family to look after them – they are truly alone;

If a widow has children or grandchildren, **they're** the ones who should be helping her with what she needs... As Christians, we must learn to show godliness to members of our family first. Paul says “**This is pleasing in the sight of God**”... He also says something quite cutting: ⁸ **But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

It's really sad that we live in a culture that tries to outsource and professionalise everything. It is a **godly** thing, for Christians to look after their aging parents. It is a godly thing, for Christian grandchildren, to care for their aging grandparents.

Jesus made this very clear. The Pharisees would say, “I know God commands that we have to look after our parents in their old age, but I'm going to dedicate that time and money to God stuff.” Their tradition said, “If they did that, they were off the hook”. It was called Corban (Mark 7:11)... Jesus found that practice abhorrent.

But what do we do in our culture? We pack-em-up and send them off to the old-folks-home, and let the paid professionals look after them. **And** we convince ourselves that we have their welfare at heart, because the professionals can do a far better job than what we can...

And maybe there might be a time for that, when our loved ones need full-on medical care. But way too many of the elderly, are dropped off at the local old-folks-home because their family don't want to be tied down by them...

Alright, so it is our responsibility first, to care for our aging parents/grandparents... And for us as a church, we step in for those who are **truly** alone, and have no one to care for them.

ii) What else do we assess? Well, this is where it gets a bit tougher. And this assessment is tough because it requires a level of judgment. Basically, we're given a picture of "Godliness"... In the church, we take care of our own. The easiest way I can say this, is the Godly care for the Godly – God's children care for God's children, because we're family...

I have a landline at home, and I think I've told you this before: hardly anyone ever rings me on it. But I would say that probably about 95% of the calls that I receive on the landline, are people looking for a handout... When someone wants money for fuel, or if they've run themselves short, and they need something before the next welfare payment, their attitude is, "It's the church's job to give it to me."

Now, I will never see someone go hungry, and so we keep loaves of bread in the freezer, and 2min noodles in the cupboard, to make sure they don't go hungry. If I've got sweet potatoes growing in the garden, I'll give them sweet potatoes....

But you know what? Many are quite indignant about this – that we wouldn't just give them money... And I remember one lady said to me, "Well if you don't give me money, what do you do?", And I said, "Ah, let me introduce you to Jesus", and she hung up on me...

Yes, we love all people, because God loves all people. But, there is also a time for tough love. And if Godliness is demonstrated by caring for our family first, then Godliness is demonstrated by caring for our church family.... And how do we assess this??? Godliness. The Godly, care for the Godly. God's children, care for God's children.

And so, a judgment call has to be made, but the thing with making a judgment, firstly we need to take a good look at ourselves: Am I living a Godly life???

So, let's move on to the 2nd point:

2. Godly Living (Godly living for the aged, **and** Godly living for all of us)

As those who are saved/redeemed by the blood of Jesus, how should we live? We live as disciples, following our Lord Jesus Christ... And here, we're given a picture of Godliness, in a very practical sense.

- Self-provision (where possible);
- service (always);
- prayer

Wherever we are able, we should provide for ourselves. Paul was very blunt in 2 Thessalonians 3 he said, If a man will not work, he shall not eat... If am able to work, no matter how menial the work, I **must** work. And even the elderly, are

valuable, productive members of society, and this is a Godly thing.

The thing is, many people today, believe it is their right to **not** work. And many of the elderly believe they don't have to work anymore ("Other people can support me. I can live on the pension, because I've done enough work. I want to enjoy life now.")

My Grandfather, into his late 70's (maybe early 80's) used to deliver meals-on-wheels to the old people, and often he'd turn up there, and there'd be a note on the door, "Leave the meal on the Patio. I've gone to play bowls." And that used to frustrate my Grandad "If they're fit enough to play bowls, why do they need meals delivered???"

V⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age...

Now, health-wise / Life-expectancy-wise, 60 back then, would be more like 75 or 80 today... I think what he's saying, is "If you're still able to look after yourself, do so. Don't expect others to do what you can do for yourself."

He worries that younger widows could become idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

You know the old saying, "Idle hands are the work of the devil"... It's true. God has designed us to keep busy.

And for the widow, there's 2 paths:

- If the opportunity's there – if she is still young enough, then remarry – be a mum again;
- But there is another beautiful way of being a widow – being a widow for Jesus...

So, let's talk about the Godliness of serving.

Every one of us are able to serve, in all sorts of ways. The trouble is, too often, we fill our lives up with so much other stuff, and we starve ourselves of time, and so we do not have time to serve others... You know what? We all have time to serve. We just need to re-arrange the priorities we've set in our own lives, and you too, can have time to serve.

I introduced this message by talking about the Baby-Boomer generation, and how that's going to be a real challenge for our nation... But what **will** become a challenge for our nation, should also be an enormous blessing for the church and for the spread of the gospel...

More people than ever before, have saved up for their retirements, and are hitting the age of retirement. And I want to challenge everyone who is hearing me today, if you are nearing the age of retirement; if you have the resources so you don't need to work anymore, what's your plans? And where does the godliness of serving fit into those plans?

In every town I've ever lived in, I've watched the elderly...
Some draw on services, while others eagerly serve.

And even an elderly widow can serve. She has her hope set on God. She prays, night and day. Oh, what I would give, for a dozen widows in this church. Godly women, who would pray, night and day... Imagine the work that God would do; Imagine the number of people who would be saved in this very community, because Godly women set their heart on God, and prayed...

That's the way to live.

The opposite of this, we find in V⁶ but **she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.**

There's the 2 extreme opposites, right there... the self-indulgent person, who, "I'm old now, it's all about me", and God's word says, "If you're like that, you're dead. Even if you think you're alive, you're spiritually dead."

Compare that, to the elderly widow, whose heart is set on God, and prays and prays and prays...

But the lesson for us, is "Godliness begins now". Even in one's youth; or in our middle-agedness, the self-indulgent are dead, but those who serve, live.

Paul gives us a beautiful picture of a Godly woman, who's run her race now, but in her earlier years, she has:

- brought up kids;

- shown hospitality;
- washed the feet of the saints (she served God's people);
- cared for the afflicted;
- devoted herself to every good work

This my friends, is the godliness of serving. And the Lord is calling us to a **life** of service. It's a life of service which begins now:

- We don't wait until we've got our nest-egg built up before we can start serving;
- We don't wait until the children are grown up;
- And it doesn't stop when we retire;
- and it doesn't stop when we get old...

Godliness, is a very practical, down-to-earth thing:

- self-provision (where we are able);
- service (always); and
- prayer

No matter what stage of life we're in, self-indulgence: That's the way of the world – it's an expression of spiritual death.

Prayerful service, is an expression of profound Godliness.

Now, I don't know about you, I don't know how anyone can hear this, and not be challenged; How anyone can hear this and not be changed...

I'm going to finish off with a very short prayer, and then I'm going to let God speak to you.

Let's pray:

Lord,

I repent of self-indulgence.

How do You want me to serve you through the church?

In this stage of life I am in, or in this stage of life I am entering right now,

show me the difference between self-indulgence, and serving.

How would You have me serve?

To honour You, the One Who gave everything for me,

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/life-expectancy>