

# **The Longing to Be Whole**

## **By Lewis Winkler**

### **The Best Years of My Life?**

I was often told by well-meaning adults in my youth that the years of my youth would be the best years of my life. But in many ways, my early life was anything but wonderful. Although my home life was Christ-centered, stable and supportive, my life at school was positively miserable. As a result, I vowed to remember what it was like for me to be young. Life then was full of daunting hardships and difficulties.

Such a recollection has done wonders for me in the process of living out my limited years upon this earth. It seems clearer to me now than ever before that every stage is filled with the challenges and trials that are the inherent part of the fabric of life in a fallen world. But for many, including myself, it is so easy to look upon the past with a set of rose-colored glasses, seeing only the joys and few, if any, of the sorrows. My vow of youth and the wisdom of my limited years both remind me of this truth: In many ways, life is difficult, no matter what stage you find yourself in.

Where, I have often asked, is the source of such a longing for one's youth? I think that one of the sources is simply this: We lose sight of the problems of the past because we can hardly see past the problems in our present. They seem so large to us *now*, that our problems of the past which were large to us *then*, seem somehow petty in comparison. And this may well be the biggest issue in our struggle to remember that although the issues we faced may have been different, our past was often times as hard or even more difficult than our present.

### **The Price of Wisdom**

But I see at least one more source of longing for youth that I have had to face with increasing regularity. This is the longing produced by the physical reality of aging. I have found that the process of aging is a study in contrast. On the one hand, with age often comes wisdom. And for this reason, I would not want to return to the foolish naivete of youth for anything. But with wisdom comes a price. It is the price of both physical and emotional injury along with time's relentless wear and tear.

And while the emotional toll that time engraves upon our soul is an important one, it is to the physical cost that my thoughts have turned to lately.

The fact of the matter is that over time, our bodies simply wear out and eventually stop working. And contrary to such hopeful thinkers like Deepak Chopra, the process is more than merely mental. From the time of the fall until now, death is an inevitable part of the life cycle. And one of the consequences of my physical deafness is that it has forced me to contemplate the fragile nature of physical existence. With time comes decay. Little by little our bodies start to "give up the ghost" at a fairly early age. For some, that relinquishing spirit comes earlier than it does for others.

### **The Longing for Youth**

It may not manifest itself in hearing loss, but in some way shape or form, every one of us is, to some extent, experiencing the debilitating effects of the sin of Adam and Eve. Let's face it. We long for young bodies again.

We long for just one day when we can eat a large sausage and pepperoni pizza at midnight (like I used to do in college) and not wake up the next morning with severe indigestion. We long for just one day when we can wake up without a morning backache and aching joints. We long for a rock-hard stomach and skin as smooth as a newborn baby's bottom, without any of the baby fat lurking underneath. In short, we long to be strong and young and whole once again.

The world also has this God-given longing, but without any lasting hope for restoration in the process. The best they can hope for is a glass of Alka Seltzer, a shot of cortisone, a tummy tuck and a facelift. Is that all we have to look forward to in old age? For myself, I long for heaven. I long for a time when I will be able to hear again, as I was intended to hear, without the use of plastics, mini-circuits and air-zinc batteries. And I long to hear men and women from every tribe, tongue and nation shouting and singing praise to our great God and King for all eternity in a place where there will be no pain, no death, no aging.

### **One Consistent Theme**

As the reality of living with deafness for the rest of my earthly life sank in, God brought one consistent theme to my attention, a theme echoed in the New Testament passage of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Here, Paul teaches that as Christians, even as God is at work in our spirits to renew and heal the profound effects of sin on the soul, our physical bodies continue to suffer the deleterious results of sin in the world. And what does he call the physical trials and deterioration? "Light and momentary troubles" which result in "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Whatever physical problems we face in this life, they are nothing compared to the benefits we will someday experience in the life that is to come.

And so, Paul concludes in verse 18, we have reason to fix our gaze on the things that will last forever because the temporal things that afflict us on earth will no longer afflict us in eternity.

And now, more than ever before, I can echo the passion of Paul, who lived with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7), when he said, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). God didn't give Paul perfect health. He gave Him grace to live with chronic infirmity until his life was over. And thus far, God is giving me and those closest to me a similar kind of grace.

### **We Have a Reason for Hope**

The older I get, the fewer reasons I see to hold on to this life. I have become more convinced than ever that my hope is in the *real* life that is still to come. And I can more honestly say, I am "longing to be clothed with [my] dwelling from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:2).

We have reason to live with joy and passion in this life as we follow our Savior and God, no matter what circumstances we face. And God wants to and will use us if we yield our lives to Him. There is far more to real life than this shadowy one alone. What hope we have in Jesus, not only in this life, but far more in the restoring life of eternity that is yet to come. What joy is ours in Him! And what an opportunity we have to face our aging process with genuine and joyful anticipation, rather than dread, if we keep in mind the fact that someday, probably much sooner than we think, we will experience the ultimate healing when “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

May our weakness and infirmities drive us closer to Him as we fulfill the plans and purposes He has laid out for us before the very foundation of the world. After all, there is no one else we can go to who is able to fully rescue us from the terrible results of sin in this world. And although that final rescue will not come until we find ourselves in eternity, it is God and God alone who has the power to save and heal us completely and forever, body, mind and soul!