

Not Dead Yet

Fighting Nine Fears of Old Age

Senior Sojourners | Minneapolis

Resource by John Piper

Topics: Fear & Anxiety, Retirement

Subscribe

AppleSpotify

I need to join you in the fight against the fears of aging by faith in future grace.

I have nine fears we will walk through together, and I'll give you biblical antidotes for those fears. These antidotes will work through faith, and without faith they won't work. But by faith they will work, and fear will be overcome, and we will go to be with Jesus in due time without walking in fear during our last season. That's my hope.

Living by Faith in Future Grace

Let me give you a word about *future grace*. I picture the Christian life as a stream of divine grace flowing to me from the future. I'm walking into it. It flows over the waterfall of the present into a reservoir. The reservoir is getting bigger and bigger, which means our thankfulness as we look back should be getting bigger and bigger, right?

As grace comes to us, it flows over the waterfall of the present, and it accumulates in a reservoir that will get bigger forever and ever. We'll never stop getting grace from God because, for eternity, we will never be deserving of what good comes to us. (Read Ephesians 2:7. It's one of the most amazing verses in the Bible.)

“We'll never stop getting grace from God because,
for eternity, we will never be deserving of what
good comes to us.”

So what's the disposition of the heart that relates to the future stream and the disposition of the heart that relates to the past reservoir? The answer is

gratitude as we look back and faith as we look forward. That's why I'm calling it *faith in future grace*.

And by *future*, I mean the future five minutes from now or in an hour, when we finish. Will God sustain me, or will I not be sustained for this hour? I am trusting grace to arrive moment by moment as sustaining power from God — free and gracious. And you're going to sit there, being held and sustained by grace. It's coming to you moment by moment, and we're called to trust him.

Four Fruits of Faith

That's what I mean by *future grace* and having faith in it, and my goal for this faith is fourfold. If I succeed, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in these next few minutes, four things are going to happen in your life.

First, underneath the growth and strengthening of faith in God's promises, there's going to be a joy welling up in your heart — the “joy of faith,” it's called (Philippians 1:25). Because if you trust God to take care of you, you're happier than if you don't trust him. So joy will happen.

Second, God will be glorified by that joy in him, but it's invisible glory because joy is in your heart. It might come out (that's number three), but before it comes out, your joy is in your heart. God can see it, and he's honored by it when you believe his promises and feel joy. He looks at it, smiles, and says, "I'm made big by that joy." God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. That's the watchword of my life.

Third, if you have that joy, and if he gets that glory, then you are going to be set free to think about other people and not just about your poor aging self. That's the great outward need of people our age. We tend to get together, and all we talk about is how we hurt. We say, "My eyes aren't right, my ears aren't right, my joints aren't right, my digestion is not right. Nothing's right."

I want you to be freed to serve wherever you live. You're going to wind up living in a senior home probably. Well, there are needy people everywhere, and maybe you're just a little bit ahead of them, and you have something good to do. You can do good to them. So that would be number three: to free you from being self-preoccupied and to serve.

And the *fourth* point would be that God gets public glory from that. That's visible. Let your good works shine, and God will get glory from you being freed from selfishness and sent into the lives of other people. And it doesn't have to be a big paid thing.

Those are the four goals I hope will result from increased faith, so now we move to the nine fears. The last eight are specific, but the first one is general.

1. The General Fear of Aging

Number one: fighting the fear of aging in general.

Bel bows down; Nebo stoops;

their idols are on beasts and livestock;

these things you carry are borne

as burdens on weary beasts.

They stoop; they bow down together;

they cannot save the burden,

but themselves go into captivity. (Isaiah 46:1–2)

Do you get the picture? You must sustain other gods. That's what they demand of you. They say, "You're a slave. You serve me. I need your help. Take my cart and my idol wherever I tell you." That's not good news. Most religions of the world operate on that principle, but not Christianity (or Judaism, rightly understood).

Listen to me, O house of Jacob [or Bethlehem Senior Sojourners],

all the remnant of the house of Israel,

who have been borne by me from before your birth [we're not carrying; we're being carried],

carried from the womb. (Isaiah 46:3)

Do you believe that? Seventy-seven years ago, John Piper was carried by God out of Ruth Piper's womb. He has been carrying me ever since. There is no way I could live without the everlasting arms.

Even to your old age I am he,

and to gray hairs I will carry you.

I have made, and I will bear;

I will carry and will save. (Isaiah 46:4)

He wants you to get the point: “I’m going to carry you. I’m going to carry you.”

The eternal God is your dwelling place,

and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Deuteronomy 33:27)

Faith feels that. But if you struggle to believe it and feel it, let me give you this verse: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Your outward sufficiency is getting smaller, right? You are weakening. Your body is weakening, your eyes are weakening, your ears are weakening, your memory is weakening, and everything is wasting away. That’s what it means in this age to die. We all will die if Jesus doesn’t come, to which we say, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

But I believe the promise of 2 Corinthians 9:8 is that every good work that you are expected to do by God, you will have the resources to do it — the mental resources, the physical resources, the affectional resources, the financial resources. If you don’t have the resources to do it, he doesn’t expect you to do it.

“Every good work that you are expected to do by
God, you will have the resources to do it.”

Now, they're God-given resources. This is not autonomy. This is not me contributing to God. He supplies everything. Also, if you say, “God, I can't do what I used to do,” don't feel like God is going to say, “Well, you should do what you used to do.” He won't. He won't say that. He'll just say, “Do what you can do.” Do what you can do, and you'll have the resources for it. So you don't need to be afraid. He will carry you, and the grace will be there for what you need to do.

2. The Fear of Difficult Decisions

Number two: fighting the fear of difficult decisions. I wrote down a few, like the decision of where to live. Most people, as they age, have to make choices about staying in their houses or choosing somewhere else to live.

Another one is what to do. Maybe you're thinking, “What shall I do with my time? I can't do much. But what can I do? There are three or four different

things I could do. What should I do? How do I relate to my kids, my grandkids? They don't even want me around. They don't like me. They believe I go to a cult called 'Bethlehem.'" We laugh, but it's not funny for those of us who have to deal with grandkids who can barely stand us.

So how do you relate? Noël and I sit in our chairs, and we say, "Should we text? Should we write? Should we invite? Should we email? Should we call? What should we do? What does love do?" That's the kind of thing I'm talking about — tough decisions.

Instructed Sinners

Here are a few relevant, glorious truths for those decisions. Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." And Psalm 25:8 says, "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way."

Isn't that good news? Because all of us qualify. If I had to be a non-sinner in order to get instruction, there would be no hope for instruction. And so I get this glorious promise: "I instruct sinners." So I think, "Forgiveness comes, and then instruction comes in the way."

Then Psalm 25:9 says, “He leads the humble.” That’s important. If you get your back up at God and start finding fault with God, this is not a good prospect for instruction in what is right. He “teaches the humble his way.”

Freed from Indecision

When I was a pastor, I faced so many decisions that had to be made, and I didn’t know what was best. What do you do amidst indecision? The story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19 can help us, especially the part when David, the king, says to Mephibosheth, “Why speak any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land” (2 Samuel 19:29).

Now this is the situation. David has come back from being driven by Absalom out of the city. He had victory with Joab, so he comes back, and Mephibosheth hasn’t shaved or washed. He approaches David, and David says, “Why didn’t you go with me?” For Ziba had lied about Mephibosheth and said to David, “He’s not on your side. He’s on the side of your son, Absalom.” That was not true, but David didn’t know how to prove it. It was Ziba’s word against Mephibosheth’s word.

What are you going to do? He was a king. He has a thousand decisions to make in a day, and he didn't know what to do. This is what he did. He said, "Why do you speak anymore? I've decided to split it fifty-fifty."

Now we might look at that and say, "That's a bad decision. Ziba, the liar, gets fifty percent?" But David had work to do. We cannot be paralyzed by indecision. So many people are paralyzed by indecision. Since we don't know the best thing to do, we don't do anything.

So as a pastor, I retreated to this story over and over and said, "God, at least count it as a C+ effort, please. I don't know whether this structure for pastoral care is best, or this hire in the nursery, or this . . ." So many things are not in the Bible. In fact, most things you have to do are not in the Bible. There are little decisions from day to day you have to make. And just take heart: he will instruct you, and he will guide you.

God's Will in Every Choice

I wrote to a man the other day who is tormented about whether to stay in his apartment or to go to another apartment, and I said, "Look, here's my counsel.

I know the will of God for you. It's in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification.'"

So I said, "You pursue holiness, and do whatever you want to do as far as where you live." It was very freeing to him. And I think that's what God wants you to do. You should think, "I'm going to be holy. God, make me holy. I don't want to be merely selfish. I don't want to use all kinds of worldly criteria. I want to honor you, and I still don't know what to do. I'm going to make a choice."

And once you've made it, this is where the gospel comes in. Isn't it glorious? Suppose you made a decision that was contaminated by selfishness, and you didn't see it. But it was, and it was not the best decision. Now what do you do? You trust the cross. We have to have forgiveness every day.

3. The Fear of Insufficient Finances

Number three: fighting the fear of not having enough money. You might think, "Will I outlive my pension? Will I outlive my 401(k)? How much should

I give to the kids? What should my will look like? Will I have enough? I don't want to be a burden to anybody.”

When it comes to these fears, I think this is just about the most important verse in the Bible (though there are several competing for my affections in this regard): “He [that is, God] who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). This means that if God did the hardest thing in the universe — namely, giving his Son to be tortured and killed — what would he not do for you? That's the logic, and he states it. He'll do everything for you. He will give us “all things.”

“If God did the hardest thing in the universe —
giving his Son to be killed — what would he not do
for you?”

Now, a prosperity-gospel preacher would say, “That's a promise of health, wealth, and prosperity.” But the problem with this is that three verses later, it says, “We are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be

slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:36–37).

Paul, you just said God will give us all things because he loves us that much, and now you’re saying Christians get killed, and in getting killed, they’re more than conquerors? Paul says, “Yes.” So I take “all things” here to mean everything you need to glorify God and bless people.

It’s not everything you can imagine. You might think, “I want health. I want to be done with this broken arm. I want to be done with this arthritis. I want to be done with this macular degeneration. I want to be healed.” And you don’t get healed. You’re going to die before you get healed, and the promise of Romans 8:32 is still true. You will have what you need in order to honor him and bless people.

As Philippians 4:19 says, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” I believe that. If you don’t get it, you don’t need it. That’s a sweet promise and a great way to live.

4. The Fear of Being Alone

Number four: fighting the fear of being alone. Maybe you lost your spouse, or you've been single all your life. Maybe singleness has been fine, but singleness is not looking as great when you're outliving all your friends. Maybe you start to wonder, "Is anybody going to remember me?"

So Jesus says, "Behold, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). I think "always" is even more important than the phrase "to end of the age." It's one thing to say he'll be with us to the end of the age; it's another for him to say, "I'll be with you every minute of your life."

John Paton was a missionary to what's now the New Hebrides. He was driven up into a tree as 1,300 aboriginal natives were trying to kill him. As they were beneath him, he laid hold of the promise of Matthew 28:19–20: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. . . . I am with you always."

And here's what he wrote later, because he survived:

Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. His words, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," became to me so real that it would not

have startled me to behold him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt his supporting power. . . . It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed Lord Jesus in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. (*John G. Paton*, 342)

Oh, the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing “him who is invisible”! (117)

He will be there for you. Now, I don't want to create the impression that you should discount human people in your life. God made us a church. You shouldn't have to live by yourself with nobody caring for you. That would be a failure of the community of Christians, and we should work at that. Senior Sojourners is a little part of that, but there are many other dimensions.

So I exhort you: While you can, be there for others. While you can, look around, and see who's alone. This may be the most important thing to say as far as how you can live now so that, later, there might be a few people who will remember and help you in your last hours. I think it always comes back to you. If you care for other people, then when you can no longer do that, a lot of hearts will be leaning your way.

5. The Fear of Being Useless

Number five: fighting the fear of being useless. I'm a man, so I think of men here. Ralph Winter said, "Men don't die of old age in America. They die of retirement." Which means, built into men's lives is the need to be productive. I'm sure that's true of women in different ways, but I'm thinking of men right now. A man who loses his sense of productivity, usefulness, and accomplishment is running the risk of losing his entire identity and reason for being.

Belief as Obedience

During the Olympics in 1992, I preached on "Olympic Spirituality," comparing the Games with Paul's language of running and fighting and boxing and wrestling. I looked out on the people there, a lot of them old and a lot of them young, and said, "Come on — let's fight against sin and unrighteousness. Let's be valiant for Jesus. Let's be Olympic, spiritual people."

The next day, I was told that Elsie Viren was in the hospital, dying. I had been saying, "Come on — let's fight," so then I asked, "How does Elsie, probably ninety-plus years old and dying, do that?" I wrote an article called "How Can

Elsie Run?” in the *Bethlehem Star*, in which I asked, “What does her marathon look like right now?”

The key verses are 2 Timothy 4:6–7: “I am already being poured out as a drink offering” — yes, she was. She served the church faithfully for 62 years. Then Paul says, “. . . and the time of my departure has come [yes, it had come for Elsie]. I have fought the good fight [that’s like the Olympics], I have finished the race [that’s like the Olympics], I have kept the faith.”

When Paul ends by saying, “I have kept faith,” he’s interpreting the first two phrases, about fighting and finishing. Keeping the faith is something Elsie can do, and that’s really the meaning of the other two. So imagine she had said, “Hey, pastor. I heard you preached about ‘Olympic Spirituality.’ Are you kidding me? What am I supposed to do?” The answer is *believe*. Believe him. Trust him. Rest in him. Don’t let Satan win this battle to destroy your faith.

Receiving Back from the Lord

So believing is the way to fight the fear of uselessness. Is it not amazing that Paul says in Ephesians 6:8, “[We know] that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord”? He says, “*Whatever* good . . .”

Picture the smallest, most hidden good deed you can do this afternoon. It's just some simple good that nobody knows about. This text says that God wrote it down. He doesn't need to write it down because he doesn't forget anything. But on the last day, you will receive some reward. I don't know the nature of those rewards entirely. There is some way your future for eternity will be different and better because of that. That's useful. You're useful. The smallest thing is eternally significant. That's amazing. That really is in the Bible.

Or here's Philippians 1:20–21: “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Here's somebody for whom the only thing in front of him now is death. Someone might say, “Are you telling me, pastor, that there's usefulness in the next three days before I die? I can be useful? I have a tube down my throat.”

And the answer is that Paul said his aim was that Christ be magnified by his death. There is a way over the next three days for you to die in a way that magnifies Jesus — or not. And here's the way to do it: Die like Paul did. Die like death is gain.

Now that takes huge faith, and it takes some presence of mind, which you may not have. Take Patty and Glen Larson, for example. Patty was in her mid-forties. She was married to Glenn, had four kids, and got cancer. She died, but before she died, she made a video for us. We showed it on a Wednesday night. She had a bandana on because her head was hairless, and in this video she spoke to us for about eight minutes, exhorting us to hold the faith.

She was a mighty woman, but her last half hour was horrible. When you throw up for the last thirty minutes of your life, you're not singing, and you're not praising. I preached at this funeral. It might have been one of the biggest funerals we ever had. That room was packed, and a lot of people wondered, "What is he going to say? She was a mother of four, and she didn't just die — she died horribly."

I remember what I said. I was looking right at one skeptical psychologist in the balcony. I knew what he was thinking because we were kind of friends, and I said, "The most significant, useful, glorious thing that Patty accomplished in the last hours of her life was that she did not curse God. She couldn't do any praising, but she could have spit out some real ugly stuff if she had felt like it. And she didn't." You do what you can do, right?

6. The Fear of Affliction

Number six: fighting the fear of affliction. Now here I have in mind just about everything you can imagine, but I especially want to point out something really precious in one of the next verses I share.

When you're as fit as you are now — by which I mean you are all able to get here, and that's pretty fit — you can have this in mind: “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

So your mindset with regard to suffering and affliction and pain should be this: “It's doing something good in me and for me and through me. It's making me a kind of person.” That's what that text teaches.

Made Glorious by Suffering

What about when the hour of death arrives and that doesn't make sense anymore? What I mean is that you might think, “I'm not going to be alive to

show anybody my character tomorrow. I'm going to be dead at six o'clock, and it's now noon. What's the point of my suffering in the next six hours, Pastor John? What's the point of the affliction? There are all these arguments I've heard you give for all these years of how suffering can be turned for good. But I don't understand the point of the next six hours, because I'll be gone after that."

Now, 2 Corinthians 4:16–17 is very precious to me at that very point. See if you see what I see: "So we do not lose heart [that's what I want for you right now]. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction [by that he means a lifetime] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

The Greek word that's translated as "preparing" is *katergazomai*. Do a word study on it. It means "to produce," "to bring about," or "to prepare." So this affliction is preparing, bringing about, producing "for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

Let's say I'm at a hospital bedside, or maybe in hospice, and this person knows he has maybe one day at the most. He says, "Pastor, it hurts. It hurts. What's the point?" I answer, "As God gives you the grace to endure to the end without

cursing him, resting in him as much as you can, these next twenty hours are going to make a massive, precious difference in the weight of the glory you experience on the other side. These hours are not pointless.”

I really believe that. They’re not pointless. They won’t make your character here shine because you are going to be gone. There will be no character left to shine. But as soon as you cross that line from now to eternity, in some way God is going to show you why those twenty hours were what they were and what they did for you. That’s good news.

I’ll tell you, I’m glad God is a healing God. I pray for my wife’s healing — she broke her arm last week. I pray for healing almost every day for people. And I believe he does it, and I rejoice when he does it. But that’s not the gospel, because you’re going to die anyway. Most people dealing with horrible things don’t get healed.

Good News for Lifelong Suffering

There was a man who lived in a tower across the street. His name was Robert, and half his face was gnarled and purple, and he looked like a monster really. He only went out very early in the morning and late at night. I jogged, and I

would see him, and I thought, “That man can’t go out in public. Kids would scream if they saw him. They’d run away. And he lives with this. What’s the gospel for this man? He has lived all his life in a way that you can’t look at him without cringing.”

I have a gospel for him. So I was jogging one morning, and I just stopped and said, “Hi, my name’s John.” He was utterly startled. Nobody probably talked with this man. I said, “I’m the pastor of the church down the street there. What’s your name?” And he said, “Robert.”

And I said, “Robert, I know life is hard for you because of your face.” I just cut to the chase. There’s no point in acting like, “Let’s have some small talk here about this man.” I said, “I know life is hard for you, but I’ve got the best news in the world for you. You may know it already. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to die for our sins, to forgive us for all our sins, to take us into his family, and someday to give every one of us a new body with a magnificent face.”

We had a little conversation, and I let him go. I don’t think I ever saw him again. I’m just unashamed that I’ve got good news everywhere, in the most

horrible situations. You give me any horrible situation, and I've got good news. I do.

7. The Fear of Dementia

Number seven: fighting the fear of dementia. Now this is tough, and I'm thinking about memory loss here. You go to the doctor, and they make you draw a clock. Then you have to remember the window, the butterfly, and the door and repeat it back.

I've done this before. So I'm sitting there, and I don't want to fail this test. I'm thinking, "I can still make it. Don't take away my driver's license." My memory is not nearly what it used to be, especially with the short-term. If you tell me your phone number, I can't remember the first number by the time you get to the last number. So it's pretty bleak, and it's not going to get better.

What does the Bible have to say about that? I don't know of any verses that directly address this. You might wonder, "What are these verses for?" None of us wants to cease to be ourselves, and if you lose your memory, you're not yourself anymore. If you can't remember anything, you're a different person. You have nothing to draw on.

My dad went there, but he always remembered me. I was so thankful. But basically, he was in another world, and it was a glorious evangelistic world. He was on a crusade, and he was preaching somewhere. I just played along, and we had a great time in his imaginary world. It was wonderful, sad and wonderful.

Here's 1 Corinthians 15:42-43, about the resurrection: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown [what dies and is buried] is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." When your body dies and is sown in the ground like a seed, it is three things: "perishable," "dishonorable," and "weak." Let's ponder those three words and apply them to specific situations.

"Perishable" means food that rots. You have to put it in the fridge, and it doesn't last very long. It's perishable. And that's our bodies. They rot, they decay, they waste away. That's what sin has done to us, and God is going to remove that dimension of sin and its effects at the resurrection.

Second, it's sown in "dishonor." Right now I'm 77, but here I am. I've got energy, I'm talking to you, and I feel good. I'm driving a car, and I can dress

myself. I can still tie a knot. But I think most people look at me now and think, “That’s a dishonorable reality up there.”

You may think I’m macabre in this regard, but I took pictures of my dad when he was dead. I was there when he died, and I took three or four pictures of him as a dead dad. I have them on my phone, and I think I look just like them when I get up in the morning. I try to comb my hair and get the blood flowing, but someday I’m going to die, and it’s not going to be pretty.

I visited my grandfather when I was younger, and he probably weighed 85 pounds. He had a diaper on. He was curled up in the fetal position, and we thought he was gone and couldn’t hear anything. My dad went over and said, “Heavenly Father, thank you so much for daddy,” and he prayed like that for a minute. And when he was done, that corpse said, “Amen,” but he looked awful, just awful. Dishonorable.

And then third (and quickly), it’s “weak.” The opposite is that we are going to be raised “imperishable”, we’re going to be raised in “glory”, and we’re going to be raised in “power”. All you ladies are going to be absolutely gorgeous. And you men, you’ll be whatever the ideal man is.

I think the implication is that perishability, dishonor, and weakness relate to the mind as well as the body. And that's the way I'm relating it to dementia. As the body wears out, the mind wears out, though it wears out in different degrees. And we've all known people who are sharp as a tack till they're 101 and others who aren't. There's someone I know who's 60 and uncommunicative with her mental condition. I did her wedding. She was a magnificent bride. Now she can't communicate.

8. The Fear of Failing Faith

Number eight: fighting the fear of failing faith. By that I mean, "God, am I going to make it? I am so embattled, and doubts come. I have horrible thoughts."

Take Ruth Fast, who is in heaven now, but she was one of the most magnificent ladies in Bethlehem Baptist Church when I started here. She was a prayer warrior, and everybody probably would have said she was the most godly woman in the church.

I was with her as she was dying in the hospital. Her tongue was black like a cinder. I walked into the room, and she was trembling. She took my hand. She was saying horrible stuff. It was just so unlike her.

She was being harassed by the devil. An old, godly saint was being harassed by the devil as she died. Well, that sure taught me something as a young pastor: the battle is never over. I used to think that as you lived a faithful and godly life, you became safer and safer from the evil one. That's not true.

Philippians 1:6 says, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Hold on to that. Say to God, "You save me. You save me every day, and you will save me tomorrow and bring me home."

Pressing on Toward the Goal

Philippians 3:12 is probably even more of a favorite for me: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."

Here I am, pressing on, and he's out there. I'm thinking, "I want you, Jesus. I want to make it through death as a believer and not commit apostasy and throw you away. I want you, and I want to make it. I'm reaching out for you." He reminds me, "Hey, the only reason you're reaching out for me is because I've got you." Isn't that what that says?

Paul says, "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." The only reason you want Jesus is because he took you, he got you, and he laid hold of you. The only reason you reach forward to heaven is because he has got you. You wouldn't otherwise.

Called and Kept

Or here's 1 Corinthians 1:8–9: "[He] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." The implication of that is that he keeps whom he calls.

Or as Romans 8:30 says, "Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also

glorified.” The golden chain will not be broken. If you’re called, you will be kept.

Then there’s one of the greatest doxologies in the Bible: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever” (Jude 24–25).

That passage is all built on the fact that he keeps us. Haven’t you fallen in love like I have with that new song “He Will Hold Me Fast”? It says, “He will hold me fast, for my Savior loves me so. He will hold me fast.” I just love it.

9. The Fear of Death

Number nine: fighting the fear of death. Here’s a little glimpse into my life. I sleep on my side. I can’t sleep on my back. I lie there on my back, saying, “Oh, this feels so good. I wish I could go to sleep like this,” but I never do, ever, so I have to choose a side. I also can’t sleep in certain positions because it cuts off

circulation, so I have a certain position that I have to sleep in. For some reason, it doesn't cut off circulation when I'm in a certain position.

So I'm on my side, and I imagine the Lord saying to me, "John Piper, I did not destine you for wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for you so that whether you wake or sleep, you will live with him (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10). Go to bed. Go to sleep." Every night I say that.

Noël and I bought plots to be buried near our granddaughter. We're not going back to South Carolina. We're here to die. So over there, up on the hill, we've got our plot, and we've chosen some stones, and we've chosen Bible verses for our stones. And 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 — that's my Bible verse.

For some reason, for me to have God look me in the eye and say, "I didn't destine you for wrath. It's not going to happen. Are you going to die tonight at three o'clock? It's not a problem because my Son died for you" — it helps me fall asleep.

Now, I know that in the verse's context it means whether you are alive when the second coming happens or dead when the second coming happens. But either way, it works. He is saying, "Whether you're awake or asleep, you're

going to be alive with me.” And I need that. I can’t go to sleep thinking, “What if I die? What if I die?” He says, “Not a problem. We’ve got that covered. We took care of that.”

Blood-Bought Confidence

So I end on what I said was one of the most important verses in the Bible: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). This applies to every promise that we’ve looked at. That’s the logic.

So if you get in an argument with the devil or an unbeliever in your housing complex, and they say, “How can you be sure that all these promises are going to come true?” one of your answers is going to be this: “God said in his word that since he gave his Son for me, which is the hardest thing for him to do, he’ll do the easy thing, which is fulfill all these promises.” And see what they do with that. I know what the devil will do. He runs. He cannot fight the blood of Jesus.

Therefore, trust Christ. That’s the issue in this room right now. Do you trust Christ and his purchase of all these promises? Do you trust his word? Trust his

promises of ever-arriving future grace. He'll always be there. Be glad in him. Be freed by this gladness for service, not self. Glorify him by your gladness in him and your service to others. And let's pray for each other. We're going to help each other die well, right? And to live well till then.

*John Piper (@JohnPiper) is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* and most recently *Come, Lord Jesus*.*

Would you like some to talk to about aging? Stephen Ministers are especially trained to come alongside you to listen, care, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support. Talking about the process of aging is one area they can be especially helpful. There are several ways to make arrangements to talk to a Stephen Minister.

(1) One way is to complete this confidential [Stephen Ministry form](#). Bob Bohler or Deb Williams will then contact you.

OR

(2) Call directly: Pastor Bob Bohler (706-549-9284) or Stephen Ministry Referrals Coordinator Deb Williams (706-247-9000).