

In sunset of life, Billy Graham reflects on growing old

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) For much of his 92 years, Billy Graham has had one main title: evangelist.

But in a new memoir set in the twilight of his remarkable life, Graham reveals a lesser-known side of himself: a grieving and ailing widower who has difficulty getting up from a chair or putting on his shoes.

"I can't truthfully say that I have liked growing older," Graham writes in "Nearing Home: Life, Faith, and Finishing Well," which hits bookstores on Oct. 18. "At times I wish I could still do everything I once did -- but I can't."

To be sure, his book includes his signature focus on evangelism, asking non-Christian readers numerous times to come to Jesus before it is too late. But most of the book's 180 pages are filled with messages on growing old, or preparing younger readers for the reality of old age.

"All my life I was taught how to die as a Christian, but no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die," he writes in the introduction. "I wish they had because I am an old man now and believe me, it's not easy."

So, a month before he turns 93, Graham has become a teacher of sorts in *How to Grow Old 101*.

Stay involved, he recommends. And spend wisely. As the great-grandfather of 43, he warns against going into debt buying expensive gifts for grandchildren.

Prepare a will and medical directives to reduce family conflict after you're gone, he advises. And look out for the "hidden perils" of depression, anger and self-absorption.

"Sometimes I have to force my mind to turn away from whatever problem is absorbing me at the moment and make myself focus on the needs of others," he writes.

Despite their limitations, he assures, the senior years can nevertheless be rewarding. He cites biblical examples, including Moses, who died at 120 after leading the Egyptians to the Promised Land, and Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist though "well along in years."

"Are you willing to be used by God regardless of being bound by physical ailments, financial constraint, or the loneliness of growing old?" asks the man who once crisscrossed the world but now seldom leaves his home in the North Carolina mountains.

He counsels on a range of possibilities: getting involved in church or other ministries, helping others who may be ill or grieving, and building a mature faith through books and Bible study.

"God forbid that we should ever retire from prayer, the sweetest work of the soul," he writes.

Graham even manages to find humor in the gradual loss of senses that accompanies old age. Recalling hearing younger people screaming "Can you hear me?" into their cell phones, he said: "It's sometimes comical to hear the younger generation ask their peers to repeat themselves."

For years, news reports have chronicled Graham's physical decline: pneumonia, hearing and vision loss, even tripping over his dog. His wheelchair, cane and walker now are close to his bed, and he dictated the book that took him several years to write.

"I often wonder if God, in his sovereignty, allows the eyesight of the aged to cast a dim view of the here and now so that we may focus our spiritual eyes on the ever after," he writes.

Graham reserves his most poignant prose about grief for his beloved wife Ruth, who died in 2007, two years after he held his last official crusade in New York. He always thought she would outlive him.

"Not a day passes that I don't imagine her walking through my study door or us sitting together on our porch as we did so often, holding hands as the sun set over the mountaintops," he writes.

In recent years, Graham has marked his Nov. 7 birthday with a media release about his hopes for a heavenly home. In the book, Graham writes that he looks forward to death because he's eager to be reunited with his wife. In the meantime, he appreciates the "touches of Ruth" in each room of his house.

"Before long Ruth and I will be reunited in heaven," he writes.

"More than ever, I look forward to that day!"