

Growing Young

By Andy Smith

You take over. I'm about to die, my life an offering on God's altar. This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause!

(II Timothy 4:6-7)

The bumper on the 1955 Chevy parked in front of the hardware store offered words of wisdom to all who passed by, *"Growing Old is Not for Sissies!"*. Growing old is not easy. Busyness becomes loneliness far too quickly. The kids are grown and gone. Afternoon naps become the new normal. Our get up and go, got up and went! The aspirations of youth have given way to the aggravations of aging. Growing old is challenging, and it is certainly not for sissies.

In his second and final letter to young Timothy, the great Apostle Paul is facing the reality of his own death. He is growing old, yet his words to his young friend are full of energy, rich with wisdom and fresh with emotion and purpose. As Paul faces the end of his life, he seems to be growing *younger*. In his heartfelt reflections on the past (another characteristic of growing old!), Paul's words are seasoned with compassion, purpose and hope. Maybe those are the key ingredients in the recipe of growing young.

Compassion... *"Every time I say your name in prayer—which is practically all the time—I thank God for you...I miss you a lot, especially when I remember that last tearful good-bye and I look forward to a joy-packed reunion..." (II Timothy 1:3-4).* Paul found a Godly delight in giving himself away to a young, shy pastor in desperate need of encouragement, confidence and affirmation.

Purpose... *"So, my son, throw yourself into this work for Christ. Pass on what you heard from me to reliable leaders who are competent to teach others. When the going gets rough, take it on the chin with the rest of us, the way Jesus did." (II Timothy 2:1-3)* Paul's relationship with Timothy gave him a Godly purpose in his later years. He became a coach, giving himself away to a young man needing guidance.

Hope... *"That precious memory triggers another: the special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze! God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible." (II Timothy 1:5-7).* Growing old was a joy for Paul. Timothy's life and ministry kept Paul young and gave him hope. His final years mentoring Timothy were his greatest.

Maybe someone should make a bumper sticker that says, *"Growing Young is for Mentors!"* Enjoy taking a few extra moments to relax with, **Earl, the Lonely Beaver**. Although he is growing old, lonely and grumpy, Earl still has much to offer. Don't we all?

Questions for Thought:

1. Who has had the most significant impact on your life? Why?
2. Describe a time in your life when you were really making a difference in someone's life.

Earl the Lonely Beaver

A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck

What a pretty little woodland
Spreads out before our eyes
The trees dance in the wind
White, filmy clouds roll 'cross the sky

The hillside slopes so gently
To the quiet valley floor
Where sparkling brooks and streams run free
Till into ponds they pour

These pools of crystal water
They are here by grand design
Home to birds and frogs and fish
They shimmer and they shine

The author of this wetland world?
The master woodland weaver?
The builder of this sturdy dam?
Meet Earl the lonely beaver

As beavers go he's fairly old
This is his fifteenth summer
With his wisdom and experience
He's the senior woodland plumber

He's sired and raised his family
Seen his children come and go
All with his wife named Florence
(But he always called her Flo)

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He lost his precious Flo last fall
That thought still makes him wince
Without his wife or children

He's lived alone here ever since

Where once he laughed and splashed and played
Now with his loved ones gone
He mostly works upon the dam
Which makes and fills his pond

One day is like another
When you're a sad and lonely griever
Have you found you've ever felt like that?
Well it's the same if you're a beaver

So, the summer task he works upon
The job that keeps him busy
Is cutting saplings for his dam
He chews until he's silly

He cuts each pole and strips the leaves
Then works to drag it back
To place it high upon his pile
A quite impressive stack

It's far more wood than he can use
It's cut, it's stacked, it's dried
For work's the only thing he has
To keep him occupied

And when the day fades into night
At home, he's a lonely lodger
It's sad to think old Earl's become
Just another crotchety codger

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Then one morning he emerges
Climbing quickly from the lodge
For another day of cutting poles
And painful thoughts to dodge

He waddles to a likely tree
And quickly moves to chewing
But this day's going to take a turn

For a little drama's brewing

He drags his latest sapling
To increase his inventory
And sees his pile is near half gone
He exclaims "Now what's the story!"

Someone's come and grabbed his poles
There's footprints in the clay
"I know my stack didn't suddenly"
"Grow legs and walk away!"

His anger brought his blood to boil
His temper hotly burned
He decided he would lay a trap
And await the thief's return

He settled in a hiding place
Where only eyeballs showed
How dare someone remove his poles!
How dare they steal his load!

His stealth was soon rewarded by
A noise beyond the bushes
He watched as through the plants and vines
A lone young beaver pushes

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The youngster walked up to the poles
And grabbed one with his paw
Earl sprang out from his hiding place
Shouting "Stop you thief!" "Ah ha!"

The little beaver froze in fear
At this angry apparition
He'd have likely died right then and there
If he'd had a heart condition

Earl was panting in his rage
He faced his thieving foe
"Move just one muscle my young friend"

“And we’ll really have a go”

The boy, still scared and startled said
“Hey mister, what’s the beef?”
“I’ll tell you what’s the beef” said Earl
“The beef is you’re a thief!”

“You snuck here from another pond”
“And took my hard won wood”
“I don’t know why I’m talking when”
“I should just thrash you good”

“It’s your wood?” The young beaver said
“Oh gosh, I didn’t know”
“My dad told me to gather poles”
“For his dam there down below”

“I saw this wood and just assumed”
“It was open for the taking”
“I didn’t mean to steal them”
“Honest mister, I’m not faking”

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“Did you miss the marks of teeth?” said Earl
“They’re as plain as a country mile”
“Did you think they just fell from the trees”
“Into this perfect pile?”

“I guess I wasn’t thinking”
The boy said through a cracking voice
“I was trying to obey my father”
At these words his eyes grew moist

“I’ve tried so hard to please him”
“Ever since I was a pup”
“But I never seem to make it”
“Never seem to measure up”

“So when I saw this stack of poles”
“Towering right above me”
“I thought that if I brought them home”

“Perhaps my dad would love me”

As he saw the youngster’s anguish
Earl felt his anger ebb
For the boy seemed sad and helpless
Like a fly in a spider’s web

So Earl’s heart began to soften
That heart so dry and crusty
He asked the youngster “What’s your name?”
Through his tears he choked out “Rusty”

Earl said “No real harm’s been done”
“Past my needs this pile has grown”
“Help yourself” he winked and said
“We’ll just call it a loan”

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Rusty cried “You really mean it?”
Earl smiled and bobbed his head
Rusty grinned, then grabbed a pole
Towards home he quickly sped

Just as he reached the bushes
He stopped and did a spin
“Hey sir, would it be fine with you”
“If I visit you again?”

And in that golden moment
Earl thought of his daughters and sons
He smiles and says “Why sure young man”
Rusty grins and off he runs

In the days and weeks and months to come
Rusty came to visit often
And with each trip old Earl could feel
His cold heart melt and soften

He showed young Rusty how to dam
A creek to make a pond
Where to find the choicest stones

How to weave in sticks and fronds

Earl taught him how to make a lodge
And keep it warm and dry
How to know the changing seasons
Just by watching trees and sky

As Rusty gains the knowledge
That Earl so freely lends
They've become much more than neighbors
They've become the best of friends

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Then one day Earl had a visit
(By now, these were never a bother)
But this time it wasn't Rusty
It was a visit from Rusty's father

"I'm really glad to meet you"
Rusty's dad pronounced to Earl
"I've meant to come for quite some time"
"Seems you're the source of wisdom's pearls"

"My son is just enamored"
"With your guidance and your teaching"
"I'm so impressed to see in him"
"New heights he has been reaching"

"The timing has been perfect"
"For your influence to enter"
"You've been much more than a friend to him"
"You've been an older, wiser mentor"

Earl was touched to hear these words
T'was such a nice surprise
But he could sense there was something more
He saw pain behind those eyes

"You see, I've had a troubled time"
"Connecting with my son"
"I know I can be hard and tough"

“That’s how my dad got it done”

“But sometimes I see in Rusty”
“He needs more than I’m capable of”
“Compassion...my approval”
“And most of all unconditional love”

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“As one father to another”
“I need someone to center me”
“I guess what I’m really asking is”
“As a dad, would you mentor me?”

Earl just smiled and nodded
Something new had just begun
He’d thought his days of usefulness
Were long over and done

Yet here he’d found new meaning
A new truth he had been shown
When you invest in someone else’s life
You just enrich your own

Well, it seems Earls been adopted
As the months and years rolled by
He saw Rusty grow up straight and strong
The pride of his father’s eye

For Earl and Rusty’s father
Are now both true believers
They know you get, when you freely give
They’re pretty smart...for beavers

And Earl loves his new persona
It’s the best one in the world
For he’s no longer the lonely beaver
He now goes by Uncle Earl