

The Bible is not an academic treatise, but God's instruction manual on how the life He created is to be lived. It is His desire that we view older people as contributors to our society, even though their physical and possibly their mental capacities might be diminished. Indeed, older people constitute the largest proportion of volunteers in the community. However, where they do need care, it is for local churches and individuals to step in and provide the practical support which the extended family and the state cannot offer. Above all, it is for the Church to demonstrate the love of God to all people, regardless of age.

1. What have you considered about your own ageing? What have you or will you give up – and take up – as a result of growing older? How will your attitude towards time change, or your priorities?
2. How does your church use the gifts, talents and abilities of older people?
3. How does your church help middle-aged people (both in and outside the church community) to invest in long-term relationships to help them have some companionship and support when they retire?
4. How would you rate the interaction between the generations in your church? What about your neighbourhood? How can this be improved?
5. How can your church support carers more effectively? What practical steps might you take?



Photo: Anissa Thompson

## Action point

Check your local churches and community centres to see what activities there are for older people, especially those with caring needs and/or disabilities. As a result, see what you can do to improve the situation with other people.

“ This book will prove an indispensable resource for all who are involved in the lives of old people. Reading it, however, is only the start. We must also recognize its implications. The call to the individual, Church and State for responsible, compassionate action must be heeded if we are to truly reflect the humanity which God has given us. **Elaine Storkey, TearFund President** ”

# Ageing...

**When you think about growing old or caring for an older person, what comes to mind?**

**Are you...**

- already **caring** for an older person? You will know all about the responsibilities, joys and difficulties.
- a **teenager**? Those days of growing old might seem a long way off...
- **middle-aged**? Perhaps you are thinking of things to look forward to or else concerned about issues of ageing.
- an **older person**? Then you will probably identify with many of the issues raised in the book.

Regardless of which generation we belong to, older age will be an issue for most of us to consider carefully. The Bible affirms the worth and contribution of each generation, and provides a framework for care and support that recognises the interdependence of each generation over the course of a human life.

## From Generation 2 Generation

Edited by Hannah Petra Foreword by Elaine Storkey



Based on the 1990 book by Julia Burton-Jones

## Look inside !

for a **Discussion Guide** to help small groups think through the issues of ageing and care for older people.

Use it to explore some ways to respond locally which reflect God's compassion and the church's mission to be salt and light!

**'From Generation 2 Generation' and the enclosed discussion guide offer a counter-cultural challenge to adopt a more holistic approach to old age and caring. It's written for individuals, families, local churches, and anyone concerned about the older generation.**

**Order copies online from [www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org) or phone 01223 566319**

## PART ONE

## State of the Nation

The population structure of the United Kingdom has changed significantly over the past fifty years and will continue to do so as people live to greater ages, as a result of improved health care. However, there is unequal access to health services due to social inequality, and there are also changing housing, financial and caring implications as the mean age of the population continues to increase; (in 2010, 17% of the population were over 65, by 2035 it will be 23%).

1. What is the proportion of older people in your neighbourhood compared to the younger generations? (Look up 'Age Structure' under Key Statistics for your ward or town at [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)).
2. What do you think are the main issues affecting older people? The book focuses on health (page 15), housing (page 17), finance (page 19), and social exclusion (page 21). To what extent do these issues – and their relational implications – affect older people in your community?
3. What evidence is there in the media (e.g. television, magazines) that older people are generally overlooked or misrepresented? What could you do to challenge these misconceptions (see pages 32–33)?
4. What is your own experience of providing practical or emotional care for someone, or of being cared for? The experience could include times of illness, disability or unemployment, as well as older age.
5. A large proportion of carers are themselves older people (page 24ff). How visible are these carers in society? Are their needs and their challenges known? What can be done to support older carers, especially with regard to their health, relational needs and financial situation (pages 29–31)?

### Action point

Consider the focus groups mentioned on page 14 and the questions they were asked, listed in the appendix. Gather a group of older people together in your community (not necessarily belonging to your church) and ask them the same questions to see how they respond. Use the responses to suggest a plan for how people of all generations can make a difference for older people in your church and/or community.

## PART TWO

## The Biblical Perspective

When addressing any issue in society, it is important to consider what light the Bible casts on the subject – including older age. It is in the Old Testament in particular but not exclusively that we discover the holistic perspective of what God's intentions are for society, and the way it should be organised. Older people are a key feature of this social landscape.

1. Britain has a “secular, materialistic value system which venerates youthfulness, prizes economic productivity and fears death” (page 34). Do you agree? Does this affect the way that older people are viewed? How does society measure up to the biblical principles outlined in the book?
2. In what ways does the Bible view later life as a blessing (see Ex. 20:12, Job 42:16-17, Prov. 17:6)? Which cultures still think like this today? What aspects of intergenerational blessing might be nurtured and how?
3. Read the story of Jethro and Moses in Exodus 18. Which older people have been mentors to you? Think about some specific encouragements or lessons, and share them with others or write them down to remind you. Give thanks to God for the influence on your life of those who have gone before you.
4. Each one of us is part of an extended family biologically, but how significant is your one to you relationally? Read through the book of Ruth. Practically, who needs care in your extended family, and who is providing it? What should be done for those without any close family?
5. From a biblical perspective, what should the role of the state be in caring for older people, especially in the areas of health, housing and finance? How should that compare with the roles of extended family and the local community, including the church? (See 1 Tim. 5: 3-5, 8, 16.)

### Action point

Think of activities, particularly within a church or community setting, where older and younger generations can interact in a meaningful way. This could include sharing life experiences, befriending and caring for each other, celebrating public holidays, or passing on practical skills (such as gardening, DIY or computing). Now share these ideas with a church or community leader, and be ready to help make them happen.