



# SEASONED IN FAITH: WEEK 10

## ELISABETH AND ANNA 05.06.18

### FOCUS VERSES

#### II Timothy 1:5

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

### LESSON TEXT

#### Luke 1:5–7, 13, 24–25

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

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13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

.....

24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,  
25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

#### Luke 2:36–38

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.



### FOCUS THOUGHT

Service to God changes with age and time but does not diminish in importance.



## CULTURE CONNECTION

### Lingering in the Temple

“Anyone who has helped lead a church from forty to seven hundred members and then has seen it grow into the thousands deserves to retire. A person expects even those who have not endured the challenges of such a dynamic ministry to kick back in the golden years and not be so consumed with the task. However, Vesta Mangun has not let age stop her from making a continuing impact on her world.

After so many decades of dedication, she continues in fastings and prayers, watching for her Savior to appear. Countless souls have been blessed by her fervent praying. Thousands have been touched by her knock on their doors. Millions have been influenced by her impassioned message to pray, pray, pray!

With her husband G. A., Vesta Mangun went to Alexandria, Louisiana, in 1950. Through their zealous ministry and later the leadership of their son, Anthony, the church experienced several moves into bigger and more improved buildings. Still, one thing could not be improved upon: the sight of a thin, white-haired woman bowed in prayer, seeking the face of the Lord and standing in the gap for lost or struggling souls.

Like Anna in the New Testament, Vesta Mangun has continued a life of prayer and fasting after being widowed. May all believers in the Lord follow her example to be daily in the presence of the Lord and quick to introduce Him to all who will hear.

### OUTLINE

- I. ELDERS CAN STILL CONTRIBUTE
- II. NEARLY ALL CAN SERVE IN SOME CAPACITY
- III. ELISABETH AND ANNA PROVIDED VITAL CHRISTIAN SERVICE
  - A. Elisabeth
  - B. Anna
- IV. BLESSING FUTURE GENERATIONS

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Time can be one's greatest enemy or best asset. With time, houses deteriorate: shingles fall off, foundations settle, paint peels, and things just wear out. Time also allows tomatoes to ripen, apple trees to blossom, and seasons to change. Time is a neutral force that works differently on living beings and on inanimate objects. Inanimate objects grow worse with time: houses, cars, and other inanimate objects age, break down, and become unusable. Generally speaking, living things improve with time to a point.

Age in humans does not have to be a negative thing as long as the living water is flowing within. Even the young can become the living dead if they stop dreaming, hoping, praying, and growing. While focuses and purposes will change throughout a person's life, each individual's life has meaning. Rather than wearing oneself out by looking back to what should have or could have been, each child of God must live in the moment of what God wants life to be today.

Retirement is a time to reflect and refocus priorities. This does not mean individuals have finished pursuing their life's purpose. However, the method of making life meaningful will be different from what it was before. Beautiful voices may crack and not carry a tune anymore. Preachers may be spent and not have the energy to expound the Word of God as they once did. Fortunately, life is not about personal fulfillment. Retirees can find meaning and purpose in the premium years by investing in others. Rather than becoming like a stagnant pond, elders in the Lord should keep a constant inflow of the springs of life and an outflow into others' lives.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

One day as Zacharias was going about his priestly duties, the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared to him to announce that his prayer had been heard and the answer was on its way. Zacharias had settled into the daily routines of life, perhaps even giving up hope that at his advanced age the prayer for a child would ever be answered. But God had bigger plans for him—yes, even in his golden years.

Gabriel made an abrupt entrance to Mary's life too. She was not expecting to be expecting. Then again, neither was Elisabeth, Zacharias's wife. If Zacharias and Elisabeth were over the hill, Mary had just begun her climb. Zacharias and Mary were both shocked to hear the angel's announcement of an unplanned pregnancy. The young woman's amazement became wonder-filled belief; Zacharias gaped in startled disbelief.

### I. ELDERS CAN STILL CONTRIBUTE

Panic gripped the old man. He had entered the quiet, predictable confines of the Temple. While standing before the golden altar, he became visibly shaken when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Zacharias stood there, staring in silent fear.

"Do not be afraid, Zacharias," Gabriel instructed.

Zacharias was not instantly awash with relief, but he was paying close attention.

"Your prayer has been heard," the angel announced. "Your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John!" Gabriel continued to express how wonderful this event would be, what joy and meaning the child would bring to the man and his wife, and how this little life would turn the hearts of many people toward the Lord.

It appears that Zacharias had given up hope. Early in marriage, Zacharias and Elisabeth were a hopeful young couple looking forward to children blessing their home. Zacharias especially wanted a son. Years and then decades went by with no children. When God brought the answer he sought, Zacharias was no longer asking for it.

"I'm sorry," Zacharias told the angel. "You will have to confirm this to me somehow. My wife and I are well past the age of having children."

Gabriel then gave him a sign—he struck the dumbstruck man speechless. He would be unable to talk until the promise came to pass.

Sometimes humans are guilty of looking at the glass as half empty rather than half full. Zacharias stood before the golden altar inside the Temple. Very few men could stand there. There was no reason to be negative about his usefulness in life. Outside a large crowd of people were praying and waiting expectantly to receive a blessing from him. Too often, age-related difficulties and setbacks can cause a person to see life in a dim view rather than from the hope-filled perspective the Lord has.

No persons should use their age as an excuse for God not to use them. Just because their bodies have aged does not mean they are past the season of working in the His kingdom. God is not done with people even if society counts them as being past their prime.

### II. NEARLY ALL CAN SERVE IN SOME CAPACITY

John Wesley wrote thousands of personal letters, preached over forty thousand times, wrote a Bible commentary, and traveled almost a quarter of a million miles on horseback. Such accomplishments can intimidate the busiest of souls in the Kingdom. Not everyone will be a super-producer or an over-achiever; however, every child of God must be busy about His kingdom.

John Wesley was busy for the Lord from his mid-thirties until his late eighties. George Mueller, however, traveled just about as many miles—many by boat. His preaching reached millions of people. The difference between the two men? Mueller started this venture when he was seventy years old.

Fanny Crosby finally found her life's purpose at age forty-three when she wrote her first song that brought glory to the Lord. Songs began to flow from this woman in such abundance that no one knows for sure how many she wrote—it is estimated to be between eight and nine thousand!

Age is not the determining factor in whether a person can work for God. Perhaps some individuals in their later years have more time than they had before to work for the Lord. As long as an individual is mentally capable,

there is some area where working for the Lord is possible.

Three phases of life appear in II Timothy 1:5 where Paul applauded young Timothy's faith, which came to him by way of his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. We could view life in thirty-year increments, if we were fortunate enough to live nine decades. Knowing which phase we are in can help us better relate to the two others.

The first thirty years of life can be considered a season of preparation. Children grow into adults while learning, studying, and getting a good grasp on the facts of living. During this time, they should develop a close walk with the Lord. Those in this age group settle on a life focus and study and apply themselves to learn that career.

After the thirty-year mark, people often are doing what will be the major focus of their lives. Children of God will often have found their niche in ministry and life purpose. This is the time to make a mark on the world—to contribute skills and innovation that make the world a better place. Individuals would hope to contribute thirty or more years to productive service.

By age sixty, a person has reached what some view as the golden years—a time to relax, retire, kick back, and enjoy. While, for the most part, the work load at sixty should not be what it was at thirty, perhaps a new perspective will help us not to see ourselves as over the hill. This last third of our lives is a time to reinvest in those who are preparing. By this time, we have a better perspective through experience and observation that can help those who are still maturing to avoid some pitfalls in life. Mature people have wisdom and insight in the Lord that will help younger people to clear many obstacles they might not otherwise see. Senior citizens should see that their time is not over even if their strength has begun to fade. Faith and faithfulness make them into priceless treasures in the kingdom of God.

### III. ELISABETH AND ANNA PROVIDED VITAL CHRISTIAN SERVICE

"You are too old," the missions board told one woman who wanted to serve overseas. God, who does not count time as we do, thought otherwise, and soon she was on her way to do a work for God.

Neither did Elisabeth consider herself too old to serve the Lord in whatever He called her to do. She simply said, "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men" (Luke 1:25).

Following the spirit of Elisabeth, and borrowing from her name, Eliza George persisted as a missionary in Liberia even when the missions board forced her to retire at sixty-five years of age. She found her own supporters and continued to serve in her field of calling for nearly thirty years longer!

#### A. Elisabeth

There is no spotlight on Elisabeth until she reached her golden years. However, there is something more important about her life than just that "moment to shine" event. The Bible says she and her husband were "righteous before God" and "blameless." While doing dramatic works for the Lord makes great stories to post on Facebook, the daily and consistent life of someone sold out to the Lord is of much greater value. Elisabeth was ready to accept what the Lord brought her way—even if her body was surprised by the sudden change.

Many have a call from God in their youth that they are unable to fulfill until their later years. Margaret Cole was one such woman who wanted to go to the mission field the day she was baptized as a teenager. She finally made the trip at age seventy-one after living a full life and burying her husband. She traveled throughout the Eastern Hemisphere and enjoyed more adventure and usefulness in a few years than most people experience in a lifetime. Maude Cary opened a work in Morocco at the age of seventy-two.

Evelyn Brand lived as a missionary in India long after her missionary-husband passed away. By age seventy-five, she was practically too old for the demands of that outreach. She fell, breaking her hip, and had to endure the trip down the mountain on a stretcher and then bouncing 150 miles to a care facility. She had to try to recover without modern conveniences. She began walking with canes and riding a pony for transportation. Despite her difficulties, she labored on for nearly two more decades, fighting through tropical

diseases and muscling her way through more injuries from falling off her mount. At the age of ninety-three, she relented from trying to ride horseback and let the loyal villagers carry her from place to place on a stretcher. She did this faithfully for her two remaining years.

Elisabeth cared about others. Rather than let her lack of a child turn into bitterness, she let life's valleys soften her. Her gentleness appears in her response to the Lord's gift of a late-in-life child and her thankfulness to Him for this surprise. Elisabeth did not manifest good character just toward her own child. She cared about others.

When Mary came to her, still stunned by her own good fortune, Elisabeth received her joyfully even though Elisabeth was entering her third trimester of pregnancy. Mary must have faced a social backlash for being pregnant without yet being married. Elisabeth provided a safe harbor for this teen who also lived for God with all her heart. Elisabeth was in tune with the Lord and responded in the Spirit with joy at what He was doing in her young cousin. Mary and Elisabeth had a lot to share in their circumstances: they both had an unplanned pregnancy—Elisabeth thought she was past being able and Mary did not think she was yet able!

Elisabeth could have done like some elderly folks who get too focused on their own experiences and obsess about finding someone to listen to their stories. Instead, she had learned the principle of giving back and investing in the younger generation. By doing so, she not only encouraged Mary, but she also became one of the first to know of God's miracle in the girl's life. While it is comforting and encouraging to share one's own experiences with others, investing in the next generation will open our eyes to what the Messiah is doing in them.

## **B. Anna**

Both Anna and Simeon were awaiting the coming Messiah. Anna had given her life to serving the Lord. In her wrinkled and silver-streaked years, she still longed to see the Lord and lived for little else.

The Bible says Anna was of a "great age." Any age when one serves the Lord is not over the hill or outdated. Each elderly person in the

Lord should exult that he or she has a "great age." While society intimidates the elders into dyeing their gray hair to hide the relentless march of time, God's people should realize that white and gray hairdos are their crown of glory (Proverbs 16:31).

Anna sought to dwell in the presence of the Lord. For her, this meant staying in the Temple precincts. Today, we do not find Him only in a building made with men's hands. We find Him in prayer and in keeping a worshipful spirit throughout the day.

Even though a person may not have much energy to give in their golden years, they still have a lot to contribute to the Kingdom. Anna served the Lord with fasting and prayer day and night. What a powerhouse elderly people are in the Lord when they pray deep, mountain-moving prayers.

Anna did not pray in the Temple because that was how she was raised. She was of a northern tribe and may not have seen the Temple in her childhood. At eighty-four years of age, she loved the Lord with all her heart and sought to see His kingdom come.

One eighty-four-year-old woman joined her eighty-two-year-old sister in prayer and fasting. Peggy and Christine were blind and crippled, respectively, in their old age as they prayed in the historic revival in the Scottish Hebrides.

In her later years, Maude Wilkins testified to the secret of vibrant elderly years: "Fasting and prayer. Those are the keys. Our people eat too much nowadays and they think about themselves too much. I learned early that to be successful in the ministry required hours of prayer, like four hours a day, and days of fasting—like three days of fasting, eat one meal, and three more days of fasting. The flesh must be willing to suffer in order to see sons and daughters born into the kingdom of God. One must be unafraid to suffer hunger pains for His glory. It was during these times that I was overshadowed by the mighty power of God and was protected from all evil forces. Yes, fasting and prayer are the keys, and don't you ever forget it!" (Mary Wallace, *Pioneer Pentecostal Women*, Vol. 1).

Anna did not think her age entitled her to anything. Instead, she was overwhelmed with gratitude at what the Lord had allowed her to

experience and gave thanks to the Lord that she had the opportunity to see the Christ child arrive at the Temple. She then told others about Him. Oh that all of God's children of "great age" would pray and tell everyone about Him until He shows up in their towns.

Even an elderly lady can have some spunk. Jewel Fauss was invested in the work of God in Houston until the end of her life. When the congregation outgrew the church building of Greater Bethel Tabernacle, she joined the younger people in helping to raise funds for a new building. This consisted of a sponsored march from the old church site to the new one. Jewel got her sponsors and marched with the team the entire seven miles! She found seventy-eight years to be a great age to be doing the work of the Lord (O. F. Fauss, *What Hath God Wrought*).

Unquestionably, believers can do great works for God even in their later years. Not until she was in her sixties did Carrie Eastridge do a great work with God in Africa by starting churches in new places. Oma Ellis was over sixty when she took the pastorate of a church in Arizona and served in the Arizona District. After taking the pastorate, she experienced divine healing of breast cancer.

Even in cultures where the voice of a woman is not usually respected, people will often listen to an older woman out of respect. The power of a prayed-up granny can bring even the toughest men to repentance.

God still wants to heal, deliver, and save the young and the old. In the book *Profiles of Pentecostal Missionaries*, Lucile Farmer told of a 125-year-old man in Ecuador, whom family members carried on a stretcher to hear the Acts 2:38 message. At the word of the preacher, the man received strength to stand and walk down to the baptismal waters. When he was baptized, God healed his hearing, and in a few days he received the Spirit of God, speaking in tongues. Just a few weeks later, he passed away.

#### **IV. BLESSING FUTURE GENERATIONS**

The temptation as individuals age is to look back and think of bygone days. But by the grace of God, they should focus on today. It is a matter of seeing through God's eyes rather than their own fading vision.

At the same time, they should not obsess with the future. It is still as unknown now as it was during childhood. Rather than fear what will come after they are gone, children of God should invest in the next generation so the rich heritage continues. Young people should not have to build a walk with God from scratch when they have the legacy of the elders to build on. This requires commitment from two sides: the elders should make the effort to give back, and the youth must see the value of listening and asking questions that draw out the wealth of wisdom available.

In the kingdom of God, the godly older women are to teach the young women how to be guardians at home, good wives and mothers, and examples of individuals with strong morals.

*"That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded" (Titus 2:2-6).*

Penny Nichols told of an experiment conducted with octopuses learning by observation in two different tanks out of line of sight from each other. One set of octopuses was trained to attack red balls whenever they were dropped into the tank. The balance group was trained to attack white balls when presented. Once these octopuses were trained to respond aggressively to the harmless balls, caged octopuses were introduced to each tank to observe the behavior of the trained creatures.

Once the new creatures had amply observed the "threat" of the two types of balls, the researchers then released the two sets of caged octopuses into a new tank. Both white balls and red balls were dropped into the tank. The octopuses that had observed their mentors attacking red balls attacked only the

red balls; the creatures that witnessed their role models attacking white balls immediately attacked the white balls. The students by observation reacted much faster than the trained octopuses had.

Although humans have four limbs less than this aquatic test group, we learn in much the same way. Children often grow up to mimic the behavior of their parents. Children, youth, and new believers need godly people to observe and imitate. Prayerful and committed youth will develop in an environment of prayerful, committed elders.

Elisha became a powerful man of God because a rough old man, Elijah, mentored him in faith and ministering the Word. God taught Elisha the transfer of anointing by his accompanying a man of great prayer and faith. Young people today should attach themselves to exemplary role models. Prayer and faith are not easy to learn from books alone.

When Elisha was on his own after Elijah was gone, he heard from God about the enemy's plans and warned his nation. The enemy decided to take out this man of God. When the invading army came to town, Elisha was not worried, but his understudy was. Elisha prayed that the man's eyes would be opened, and suddenly the man saw the armies of the Lord, who were on their side (II Kings 6). All young ministers and believers need an Elisha

who can see God at work in the world around them. Those with spiritual vision give insight and direction to those blinded by fear. A child of God needs to find a faith-filled mentor—or be one to someone else.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Growing old cannot be all bad—everybody is doing it! When others say, “You’re too old,” we must have the mindset that God is older than we are and He is still at work. While age and strength may limit what a child of God can do, remember the Lord still will do great things through those of great age. There is no greater contribution to a church than to be a person of prayer and knowledgeable command in the spiritual realm. No matter how old children of God get, He still has a plan for their lives.

Every Paul needs to raise up a Timothy. Every John Mark needs a Barnabas and a Simon Peter to speak into his life. A Joshua wants to bask in the afterglow of a Moses' prayer life. Each life must grow spiritually tall enough to overshadow that of another.

This is the day of non-traditional students and second-career professionals. In the kingdom of God, we do not retire; we simply recycle. We should put our life experiences to their best use by teaching others and setting an example for the next generation. ■

## REFLECTIONS

- What have you given up on because it did not happen right away?
- What stage of life are you in: preparing, doing, or giving back?
- Like Zacharias before the altar, what opportunities can you reflect on and be thankful for?
- How did you learn what it was God wanted you to focus your energy and efforts on?
- How have you invested in someone else's future?
- How has someone else invested in your life to help you develop to spiritual maturity?