
AGING AND LOSS ARE REALITIES
OF LIFE

Are you wearing out—or falling apart? Is your hearing, vision, or energy diminishing?

For older people, seeing a doctor or being in a hospital is often a dehumanizing experience. As your body goes through the inevitable changes of aging, do you ever feel like you are just a collection of symptoms rather than a person with feelings?

The story *O' Mr. Tentmaker* has often made me think about my own experience with aging. Full of despair, the author cries out,

O' Mr. Tentmaker, it was nice living in this tent when it was strong and secure and the sun was shining and the air warm.

But Mr. Tentmaker, it's scary now. You see, my tent is acting like it is not going to hold together; the poles seem weak and they shift with the wind. A couple of stakes have wiggled loose from the sand; and worst of all, the

canvas has a rip. It no longer protects me from beating rain or stinging flies. It's scary in here, Mr. Tentmaker.

Last week I went to the repair shop and some repairman tried to patch the rip in my canvas. It didn't help much, though, because the patch pulled away from the edges and now the tear is worse.

What troubled me most, Mr. Tentmaker, is that the repairman didn't seem to notice I was still in the tent; he just worked on the canvas while I shivered inside. I cried out once, but no one heard me.

I guess my first real question is: Why did you give me such a flimsy tent? I can see by looking around the campground that some other tents are much stronger and more stable than mine. Why, Mr. Tentmaker, did you pick a tent of such poor quality for me? And even more important, what do you intend to do about it?

The tentmaker replies,

O little tent dweller, as the creator and provider of tents, I know all about you and your tent, and I love you both. I made a tent for myself once and lived in it in your campground. My tent was vulnerable, too, and some vicious attackers ripped it to pieces while I was still in it—on a cross.

It was a terrible experience, but you will be glad to know they couldn't hurt me. In fact, the whole experience was a tremendous advantage because it is this very victory over my enemy that frees me to be a present help to you.

O little tent dweller, I am now prepared to come and live in your tent with you, if you'll invite me. You'll learn as we dwell together that real security comes from my being in your tent with you. When the storms come, you can huddle in my arms and I'll hold you.

When the canvas rips, we'll go to the repair shop together. Someday, little tent dweller, your tent is going to collapse. You see, I've designed it only for temporary use. But when it does you and I are going to leave together. I promise not to leave before you do. And then, free of all that would hinder or restrict, we will move to our permanent home and together, forever, we will rejoice and be glad.

This little story by an unknown author sure hits home. It's natural for us to long for freedom from the pain and suffering of aging, but having a healthy attitude toward our mortal bodies and eternal future can bring us great comfort.

This is God's intent. He doesn't want us to focus our attention on every rip and tear of the tent because that only leads to discouragement and despair instead of hope.

God promises followers of Jesus Christ that our frail and temporary earthly tents will soon be replaced with an eternal house. We believers can take great hope from the Bible's affirmations:

[We] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

—Romans 8:23

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

—1 Corinthians 15:42–45

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. . . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

—2 Corinthians 4:16, 17

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling . . . the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

—2 Corinthians 5:1–5

Have you invited the tentmaker, who took a tent for himself and died on the cross for you, to come and live with you in your tent? He's just waiting to be asked.

If you've already asked Christ to forgive you, to come into your life, and to help you begin again, then he *has*. Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

Having turned to Christ, his spirit is alive *in* you. Your eternal future in heaven is secured. Yes, your earthly body will eventually die, but your soul, the real you, will live in a brand new body with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever in heaven.

However, until the time comes for you to depart from this life and leave your current earthly tent, you and all other Christ-followers will encounter a variety of disappointments and losses.