

God Our Dwelling

By Dr. Manford Goerge Gutzke

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. . . . For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away ... So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. . . . O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. . . And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

I have selected a few verses from the 90th Psalm in order to talk to you about the kind of thoughts that will come when a person gets to be old and looks back over a lifetime. When one thinks about those whom we call "senior citizens," those who have lived past 65 or 70 years, their history has largely been lived. With this in mind, we could have a feeling deep down in our hearts that there is not much to be said now. True, the present generation can honor and can express appreciation for these veterans of living. We would fail in any attempt to do justice to what they have seen, what these older people have endured, and what they have accomplished in their lifetime. We would fail for lack of information.

Who today would ever know what these older people have experienced? We'll need to remember that they were active before the automobile put America on wheels. They were mature before the Wright brothers launched their airplane from a hilltop on a windy day.

When we meet and see these older people, we are sometimes impressed with the feeling that they are withdrawn. They seem to be reserved. I think sometimes we are tempted to think that they have little interest in what is going on. It's probably true: they *are* withdrawn, they *are* reserved and they *do have* little interest. But we need to remember they had interests long before they were of our present age. They had friends. They had programs in which they were engaged. They had projects that they were involved in putting over. All these things for them are gone, and they are gone so far as we're concerned. Perhaps the houses that they gathered in for their parties and meetings have been torn down. A supermarket may have been built on the field where they played ball and where they gathered together for their picnics. The hill-side on which they gathered for their afternoon is now leveled off, and it may be that the new interstate highway goes through there.

These people weren't old then. They were young. They had engagements between boys and girls and young men and women. They had sorrows that were real sorrows, and they had bereavement. Long, long ago, the names are forgotten, but these people passed through deep valleys. They even had calamities befall them. All this is gone. It has been replaced. And for what there is now, for what has been put in place, you'll just have to forgive them — they couldn't care less. Don't blame them. They loved those neighbors that are gone. They loved those friends who are now just past memories.

Perhaps you and I would feel that they don't talk much, that they don't participate in what is going on. What would we know about their memories? How could they share with us? What could they refer

to? They had landmarks by which they noted the course of their events. There was the great oak tree that stood by the wayside. That's long gone. There was the big white house on the hill that they could see for miles. It has been torn down. All this is removed, outdated, useless. The occasional marker that you see now is put up as a kind of remembrance. For them those markers are hardly fitting. They don't look right in their present place. It's almost like seeing a mummy that's put up in a casket to be looked at.

Many of the hopes that they cherished when they were young never materialized. And many of the surprises that shocked them as they grew up eventually lasted on and actually dominated their lives.

Don't blame them if they feel somewhat uncertain. They've seen so much. As a man lives and sees, he can get to be more humble. He sees that there are many, many things that he had hoped for that were out of place. Many things he planned would never have worked. And many things he never thought of, came to pass. It causes a man to be humble.

Have any of you older people, who may be reading this, ever had the experience of feeling that there is in you a certain shrinking process? Do you feel there is less and less of you as the days go by? Well let me say to you as kindly as I know how and as gently as I can, you're right. There is less of you. You know why? Because so much of a man is in his friends; so much of life is in your loved ones. When those friends pass away, one after another drops off, why yes, there is less of you. When a man's friends die, he dies. Do you feel like a stranger? You are. You don't know these people.

Now let me say one more word about this. You'll never be at home down here again. You've had your home. And now it's gone, and you'll linger for a while.

To the world, let me say a word. When we look at these older men and women around us, perhaps we should keep in mind that we are looking at survivors; each one of these is a survivor. Each older person you see represents a large company of young people in their gaiety, of young men in their strength, of young women in their beauty and their integrity. They represent a group of young parents with children. They are men and women who worked and served and cared. Then they got old and some dropped off. These are the ones that are left.

I wonder if any of you have ever had the experience of meeting some man who has been through tragic experiences in war? Have you by any chance had the opportunity of talking to a man whose company was ambushed in Korea and the majority of his buddies were killed, or even more lately in Viet Nam? Have you ever felt when you talked with them that they seemed so removed, so alone? You could be a little bit anxious and concerned. I just want to say something else to you. Let them have their quiet rest. These veterans can't talk. Who would know what they have to say? Who would understand? How could they ever tell you what actually happened when the men with whom they lived and worked for so long were so suddenly and violently taken away?

How can these older people that you look at tell you today of the First World War? They were young then. They faced it. They know about it. Some of their own friends were killed. How can they tell you of the flu epidemic of 1918 and the great destruction of life all over this North American continent? They can't tell you anything about that. Some of their friends went. How could they ever tell you about prohibition? You'd only know what you read about it in the newspapers, perhaps the magazines. You wouldn't know the excitement. You wouldn't know the hopes. You wouldn't know the joy. You wouldn't know the things that were involved in that great effort on the part of America to handle this miserable thing that is eating into the lives of so many people, even today. How could they tell you about the gang wars that used to make the front pages? You wouldn't understand. Or how could they try and tell you of the misery and the despair of the days of the Depression, long before you could turn to the government for help. People suffered loss and didn't have anything. How could they tell you of the great changes that

were involved in World War II? Today we talk about the cold war.

Don't misunderstand these senior citizens if they feel kind of tired. It may seem a let down to you, but for many of them it's old hat. They've been through it. And if some of them are a bit cynical, you should understand. They had their hopes: they saw them dashed. They had their wishes and their plans: they saw them ruined. And if you now look at them and feel that they act a little frightened, a bit afraid, you might take note. They have seen more than we have. They have seen it come and go. They have been over the top of the hill and they have looked, and what they have seen hasn't encouraged them. They know it could happen here. They know anything could happen, because for them it has.

Now let me talk to the seniors again. You look around and you feel old. You'll remember the world is really no different. You will remember that so far as the world is concerned, men still want friends. It's just as wonderful to meet a friend today as it ever was. Kindness is still a premium. A gentle word is still wonderful. But you have changed, that's true. Do you look back on your life and feel small? Do you look ahead and feel strange? Then let me in these moments tell you something. Look up. Let me talk to you from my heart. Let me just be what I am and say something to you. I'll tell you what to do. Look up. Look into the face of your God: you'll never be old. Keep looking into the face of God: you'll never be small. He gave His Son to die for you. Keep looking into the face of God: you'll never be strange. He knows everything about you.

When I look back over my life and consider all the days that have come and gone, it's a long, long way back to when I was a boy. In all the ebb and flow of the currents and the cross-currents that have happened, long ago I saw a cross on the top of a lonely hill. I want to tell you something. Throughout all these years it has not become smaller. Oh no! It hasn't become strange to me. Oh no!

Age will fall away. Keep looking into the face of God. Sorrow is comforted. Grief will be taken away. Fears will be removed. In the light of God's grace and God's mercy, you can win the victory over life, and you can win the victory over death. I want to tell you seniors something. In the presence of God you will never grow old.

I hope and trust that every one of you will be able to say from the bottom of your heart, "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come " I hope that that's the way your heart will go You can turn to Jesus and put your trust in Him. The Eternal God, who changes not, will hold you by the hand and lead you gently home. You needn't fear. He has His eye on you. He has kept you through all these years. He'll take you the rest of the way. Look up. Put your trust in Him. If you haven't any great record to present, He knows. He's not looking for that. All He wants is you. Put your trust in Him. From the bottom of your heart pray this prayer: "Father, I know You love me and care for me because You gave Your own Son to die for me. I rejoice in knowing that Christ is my Lord and Savior, and I have received Him. Now I trust You to 'lead me gently home, Father, lead me gently home.' "