

GROWING OLDER

BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Everybody I know, when they consider the only alternative, wants to get older. Well, my daughter Sandy doesn't want to get older. But she never has accepted that we can't halt time. She thought nine was the magic age. "Daddy, I want to stay nine the rest of my life."

The same was true with 12, 16, 18 and now 21.

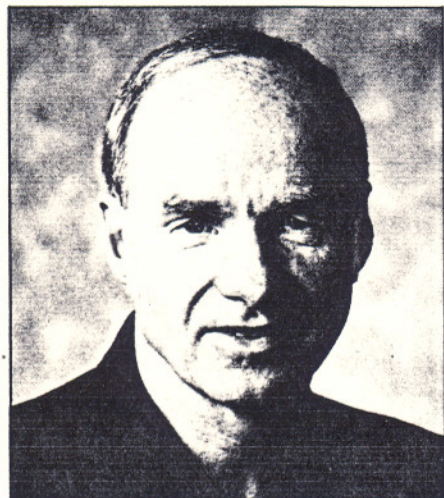
But everyone else I know wants to get older.

My mother says now and then that she's ready to die, but I doubt it.

I remember my dad telling us kids about an old man back in Indiana named Purcell who worked for my grandfather in the grain elevator. Working in a grain elevator in the heat of summer was a miserable job.

One afternoon, after a particularly hot, dusty, sweaty, fly-stinging day in the grain bins, the old man went into a nearby stable to pray. Grandpaw Buckingham was working in the feed lot outside and heard him calling out to God.

"Dear Jesus, come quickly. Come get



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old Purcell. It's so hot, so miserable I just can't take it any longer. Come take me home, sweet Jesus."

Grandpaw took his shovel handle and thumped on the door. Loudly.

There was a long period of silence and finally a frightened voice from within said, "Who there?"

"It's the angel of the Lord, Purcell," Grandpaw roared. "I've heard your prayer."

There was an even longer period of silence and finally a quivering voice answered, "Purcell ain't here right now, but I'll let him know you have been asking about him."

I think my mother's like that. She says she's ready to die—but she does everything possible to stay alive.

Old age is not a disease. It is a marvelous condition that most everyone I know is eager to catch. Unfortunately, it's not contagious and too many folks shuffle off before their time. But when you consider the alternatives, old age is a pretty good deal.

There are a number of ways to keep from growing old.

You might want to take up smoking. Or drugs. Drinking and driving is a sure formula. Over-working, over-eating, over-worrying or a combination of any of the above will surely keep you from growing old. Or, if you really want to keep from growing old, have an affair. In fact, anything which keeps you out of God's will is almost guaranteed to keep you from growing old.

A friend of mine worried so much last year (he was especially concerned about losing his hair) that he finally had a heart attack and died. His worrying did accomplish one thing. He'll never have to be concerned about growing old.

Last year, when I got a bunch of critical letters in response to one of my godly columns I stayed awake two nights thinking of ways to say nasty things and make them sound spiritual. One more night of that and I would have whipped the prob-

lem of growing old. I'd have been dead and my critics would have been alive—and probably delighted.

My wife, who has now turned 51, insists there is a difference in growing older and getting old.

I agree with her, for she's proved it in her body and in her mind. I fussed at her for years about the way she had her hair fixed. She kept saying that I wanted her to look young. I countered I didn't want her to look young. I just hated to see her give in to looking old—not older, but old.

Shortly before she turned 50 (about the time she lost 35 pounds) she decided it was time to stop looking old. Her weight loss, plus her new hair style reflected what was happening internally. She says she no longer feels "old."

Nor does she look it.

The idea is not trying to hold on to youth. That's for fools and psychotics. The idea is to grow old—for a long period of time.

When my father was 60 he had a slight heart attack. It was the finest thing that could happen to him. He stopped eating salt, pork, sugar (for years he even gave up ketchup) and anything else which could subtract years from his life. Because of this, he lived to be 87 and died in good health.

Maybe you've heard of the man who said on his 80th birthday, "If I'd known I'd live this long, I'd have taken better care of myself."

As for me, I plan to grow older. And older. And older. That means I have to live now in anticipation of it. What's the formula?

Well, it's God who gives long life. So I start by honoring my parents. Then I obey the laws of God which will prevent me from having the diseases of the Egyptians. I stay out of the way of fast moving vehicles and fast moving women. In short, I cooperate with God.

Then I can say with the psalmist: "My times are in Your hands." ↵