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POSITIVE  
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EQUATION

## How to live longer better

This is a companion, freely available, chapter to the book, *The Positive Ageing Equation*. You may have sought out this chapter because it's mentioned in the book, or you may have stumbled across it when looking at the helpful resources on ageing on our website, [thepositiveageingequation.com](http://thepositiveageingequation.com). Or, you might have heard someone talk about it. Whichever it was, here you are! (and if you haven't read *The Positive Ageing Equation*, details on how to get a copy for yourself are on the website).



# Ageing within a Christian worldview

**John Normand**

To help us live longer better, we'll discover:

- + how a Christian worldview challenges the stigma of ageing
- + hope can help us avoid the narrowing of life
- + grace-gratitude is a better way to live than performance-reward.

Jack is a retired Anglican clergyman who has recently celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Jack is passionate about helping those around him to age with positivity, grounded in the surety that a Christian worldview brings.

## AGEING READY OR NOT!

When I told a friend I was preparing some thoughts on positive ageing, their response was ‘I’m positive that we’re ageing!’. Very true ... because despite the best efforts of TV and movies, and the whole cosmetic industry, we are all still growing older (and have been since we were born). It’s beyond our scope to look at ageing for every stage of life. Instead, our focus is on people in their later years, such as early retirees and older, who want to live positively and not just inhabit ‘God’s waiting room’. This is a life stage that is dear to my heart, since I have recently turned eighty!

Ageing brings with it changes in every part of our lives. In our bodies, even though we might like to pretend we are still as flexible, strong and tireless as we were in our 20s or 30s. In our minds, even though we may not be as mentally quick as we once were, despite the crosswords we complete and the new activities we engage in. In our spirits, as we may no longer be the confident, independent, idealistic, hopeful individuals we were in our early years. Yes, we have ‘experience’, but we have also battled through experiences that may have worn us down over the years.

So how do we face the inevitable? For despite the best efforts of those who practice extreme lifestyles in the hope of reversing the processes of ageing and trying to delay and defy death, ageing is inevitable. We may not want to think about it, and we can fill our lives with distractions, but we are ageing.

If ageing is inevitable, how can we age positively and with confidence? In the book *The Positive Ageing Equation*, the authors provide you with lots of practical advice to help you age well, by showing that *there are almost always positive steps you can take to improve your ageing journey*. The Positive Ageing Equation itself shows that your ‘functional ability’ (getting things done) is made up of your ‘intrinsic capacity’ (doing power) plus the influence of the ‘environment’ (outside help).

In this chapter we go deeper and add the concept of a worldview into the mix. I will be arguing in this chapter that the Christian worldview is the one that best helps us to age positively. But to understand the Christian worldview, we first need to explore what is meant by the word ‘worldview’.

So much then of our view of the world is formed from the society and culture in which we have been raised .....

## EXCUSE ME, YOUR WORLDVIEW IS SHOWING

The 1966 film *Alfie* included the hit song *What's it all about, Alfie?* written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. The song expressed the theme of the movie which followed the exploits of Alfie to the point where he had to face the consequences of a life lived for himself, no matter who he hurt in the process.

Alfie was forced to ask, as we all are forced to ask, 'what is really important?' as we face the experiences of living.

How we understand life, and seek to make sense of it all, is called a 'worldview'. The following definition of worldview is from *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation* published by the Oxford University Press in 2024:

*A largely unconscious but generally coherent set of presuppositions and beliefs that every person has which shape how we make sense of the world and everything in it. This in turn influences such things as how we see ourselves as individuals, how we interpret our role in society, how we deal with social issues, and what we regard as truth.<sup>1</sup>*

There are a couple of important ideas to note from this definition. First, our worldview is not necessarily a thought-out, conscious view of the world based on our assessment of our experiences and the values of our society. Second, we are influenced by a range of ideas that come into our lives. These influences colour the way we see the world, and in turn, we influence family, friends and our wider society with the way we see the world.

Once we have a worldview, and we all have one whether we call it that or not, we interpret all that happens through a pattern of thinking consistent with that worldview. For example, if we think that young people are irresponsible and lazy, then that's the lens we use when we watch TV, read the newspaper and talk with our friends. And it is very hard to

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1 <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803124830471>  
(Accessed 23/02/2026)

change our settled thought patterns. For the record, that's *not* our view of young people!

That's just one example of how perceptions develop and become part of a worldview. Consider this quote from *Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013:<sup>2</sup>

*Ageing is a loaded term and holds predominantly negative connotations – particularly among younger Australians.*

The Commission's website as I write today states:

*Ageism – particularly against older adults – is so deeply ingrained in our societal norms and values that it can be difficult to recognise within ourselves and our surroundings.*<sup>3</sup>

When we reflect on a Christian worldview and how it sees ageing, we will see that a worldview developed from the Bible stands in great contrast to these negative societal attitudes.

So, much then of our view of the world is formed from the society and culture in which we have been raised, taking on the attitudes and prejudices of our parents, wider family, our friends, our schools, and film and media, including advertisers, who want us to see things their way. In more recent years, social media and 'influencers' have become a prominent source of shaping what is regarded as 'truth', especially amongst younger people.

Yes, we can change how we think about certain issues and re-shape our worldview, but it's important to understand how much of our worldview is moulded for us, and we just fit into that mould.

**... to understand how we can approach ageing from a Christian perspective, we may need to identify and leave aside aspects of a pre-conditioned worldview.**

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2 <https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/projects-and-reports-folder/fact-or-fiction-stereotypes-older-australians> (Accessed 23/02/2026)

3 <https://humanrights.gov.au/resource-hub/by-resource-type/publications/older-peoples-rights/older-peoples-rights-policy-reports/changingperspectives> (Accessed 23/02/2026)

## THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Many people reading this book will be familiar with Christianity but may have never delved deeply into its teachings (apart from perhaps the celebrations around Christmas and Easter). Others, especially those from cultures where Christianity is not a prominent religion, may know very little. The Christian worldview has much to teach about ageing, how older people should be viewed within society, and how to age positively.

In thinking about the Christian worldview, the first question we need to ask is: ‘What kind of world do we live in?’ That we live in an *open universe*, where there is an independent creator God, is foundational for a Christian worldview. So, much stems from it, especially the belief that people are made ‘in God’s image’, and that human life is to be valued.

The opposite is a *closed universe*, where there is no outside agency, and the universe is all that there is. The closed universe fits with a secular or materialist view of the world. In the 2021 Australian census, 38.9 per cent of respondents claimed to have no religion and while this number may include those who would not define their beliefs as religious, it gives us a snapshot of a growing number in our society who have no place for religion and possibly for any worldview that includes God.<sup>4</sup>

### Jesus is central

Any Christian worldview must start with the person of Jesus Christ. He has captured the imagination, creativity, philosophy and lives of people from the first to the twenty-first century, and in every country on Earth. Any criticisms of the Christian church have not diminished the popularity and person of Jesus. Jesus is honoured as a good person and teacher, even by those who are unaware of or do not accept his claims to be God with us.

Consider this remarkable quote in the biography of the English comedian and thinker John Cleese, *Cleese Encounters* (Orion, 1994) by Jonathan Margolis. He tells how the satire *The Life of Brian* came about and the way the Monty Python team toyed with the idea that Brian would be the ‘13th’ disciple.

‘We tried this’ says Cleese, ‘and we found that it just didn’t work. Because the moment you got really near the figure of Christ, it just really wasn’t funny because Christ was wise and flexible and intelligent and he didn’t have any of the things that comedy is about - envy, greed, malice, avarice, lust, stupidity.’

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4 <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-shows-changes-australias-religious-diversity> (Accessed 23/02/2026)

So to understand how we can approach ageing from a Christian perspective, we may need to identify and leave aside aspects of a pre-conditioned worldview, any negative views of the 'church' itself (no matter how well justified some criticisms are) and more seriously examine who Jesus is, what he did, and what he is still doing.

## **Jesus the creator**

In the majestic opening to John's Gospel, the Jesus seen and touched by his disciples is the same one who is God's Word through whom all things were made. He is identified as the 'word' God spoke to create the universe – the Word who was with God and who is God. (John 1:1-14). As the Apostle Paul further explains:

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' (Colossians 1:16,17).<sup>5</sup>

If we accept Jesus is the Creator, the world should be seen through His eyes, as it is His world in which we live.

## **Jesus the servant**

The Bible teaches that even though Jesus was in very nature God he did not use this equality with God for his own ends. He became a man, a servant, and in humility was obedient even to the most shameful death imaginable on a Roman cross. The Apostle Peter explains how the death of Jesus, the ultimate act of being a servant, was for us, "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross ...' (1 Peter 2:24). This was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, about 700 years before.

But that was not the end of the story, for God did not let death in crucifixion have the final word. He raised Jesus to life in resurrection and gave him the place of authority in heaven and earth. Believers are not just bystanders to this drama. He died for them, and they are raised with him. 'But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions; it is by grace you have been saved.' (Ephesians 2:4,5).

What is 'grace' here? It is not something we have earned. Believers participate in what Christ has done through faith: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ...' (Ephesians 2:8).

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5 Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations use the New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978)

## **New life, new worldview**

Because of this work of God's Spirit, our minds as believers are transformed (Romans 12:2). Believers are no longer locked into whatever worldview they have held, consciously or otherwise. Instead, they are able to embrace a Christian worldview, centred on the Lord Jesus.

This Christian worldview is both individual (though faith in Jesus) and corporate, as each renewed person becomes an integral part of the new people of God - the one new humanity. This new 'people' is the one, true church, the body of Christ who brings all God's promises to fulfilment. Not just a present reality, but a future fulfilment as God's whole creation, presently in bondage to decay, will be liberated when the children of God are revealed. (Romans 8:18-21). This great future expectation will be realised when the risen Lord Jesus returns. (Acts 1:11).

This then is the Christian worldview: a universe that God has created and within which he remains active on our behalf, specifically through the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus. Those who believe and accept this reality are offered transformed lives now as part of the new people of God, and then the great future hope of being with him, either at the moment of death or when he returns.

## **HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

As many people age, they become anxious, not just about their present circumstances, but particularly about what the future may hold. One of these anxieties surrounds the time of our death and what it means to us. Is it to be feared?

Many people resort to 'folk religion', which is to grab onto some religious ideas as a comfort to themselves or others. This often happens around the time of a funeral. Then there is the secular approach, which is summed up well by the philosopher Simon Blackburn in a short essay *Is Death to be Feared?* Found in a popular book *The Big Questions* (Quercus 2009) he quotes the Greek philosopher, Epicurus: 'Death is nothing to us, for that which dissolves is without sensation; and that which lacks sensation is nothing to us'. When thinking about one's own death, Blackburn concludes: 'My death will be like nothing for me, because there is no "me" left' - as any thought of an afterlife is considered to be deceptive imaginings. Needless to say, this viewpoint has not brought comfort to many as they face terminal illness or as people deal with their grief.

Yet anxiety about death remains and we need to confront it and our future hopes. To do this using a Christian worldview, we need to start

further back and reflect on a way of seeing the world that is at odds with the way many of us have been brought up in Australian western thinking.

**... hope for the future depends on the certainty of what God has done in Jesus, not what we have achieved.**

Many of us have been taught that we live in a 'performance-reward' world. If you want to receive anything, you have to earn it. But the Bible teaches another way, that can be termed 'grace-gratitude'.<sup>6</sup> Grace is the 'salvation' God gives to his people without it being earned by us in any way. The word grace is also used more widely to refer to any gift that is given without being earned in any way.

Throughout the Bible it is God's grace that initiates all that happens. It is his grace seen in creation, in forming his people Israel, in rescuing them and giving them a land to live in. It is by God's grace that his promises are fulfilled despite his people's rejection of him. It is his grace seen in the Lord Jesus that enables God's purposes to be fulfilled, and it is by his grace that we are drawn to be his people (Ephesians 1:4,5). God's people respond in gratitude, not to earn God's goodwill, but in thankfulness for all he has done.

So, hope for the future depends on the certainty of what God has done in Jesus, not what we have achieved. As we age, with all the changes that happen to us, it is easy to be anxious, but we have another perspective as Christians. We have the certainty of all that God has done and is doing. The crux of the Christian worldview is the risen Christ. That means that the boundary line that death represents is no longer a 'dead end'. Death and sin have been 'swallowed up' in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

## **AGEING IN A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

The Christian has hope for the future, but there is also hope and meaning in the present. But it is not just a hope that only *waits* for the future, it is a hope that shows itself in thankful enjoyment of life *now* and, especially, service toward others. Not because there is anything to earn, but because it is a response of gratitude for all God has done.

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6 Christopher Watkins, *Biblical Critical Theory*, Zondervan Academic, 2022

The Christian view of ageing is intrinsically ‘positive’, challenging the negative view we discussed at the start of the chapter. The Bible teaches that older people are to be held in high esteem. Their age is not seen as a negative but as something positive because of the wisdom they have gained over the years.

The Positive Ageing Equation shows how we can maximise our intrinsic capacity (doing power) as we age, and if needed, use the environment (outside help) to compensate for any gaps. In this way we can keep getting things done and make the most of life. We also know that our intrinsic capacity is not just about our physical abilities, but also our cognitive and mental health, and overall wellbeing.

In The Positive Ageing Equation, we also talk about the importance of having meaning and purpose, nurturing your spiritual wellbeing and creativity, and the value of helping others through volunteering. While these dimensions are well accepted in most models of how to age well, they are also fundamental to the Christian worldview. In fact, they have their origins in the Christian world view!

We can look at some key areas where a Christian worldview shows ageing in a positive light, not those negative or ageist stereotypes so prevalent today, and how ageing can be a tremendously rewarding time of life.<sup>7</sup> Some corresponding Bible references are also shown:

- **Our lives have meaning**, because we are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14). While having meaning and purpose in life is vital for everyone, and very important in The Positive Ageing Equation, the Christian worldview teaches that our very beings have inherent meaning and purpose in God’s eyes. That’s a great reason to get out of bed in the morning!
- **God wants us to continue to grow as we age**, especially within the Christian faith (2 Peter 1:5-8). And to help us in our Christian growth, God offers to be with us by His Spirit, providing us a resource at any stage, including older age.
- **We develop wisdom as we age**. The Bible teaches that wisdom is found among ‘the aged’ (Job 12:12). This directly goes against ageist attitudes, and values the life-perspective and wisdom of older people. In the Old Testament book of Proverbs an older person is

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7 <https://lukesjournalcmdfa.com/2020/12/09/positive-ageing-and-meaningful-life-dr-chris-poulos/> (Accessed 23/02/2026)

honoured and privileged, while in the New Testament the Apostle Paul encourages older women to serve by teaching younger women (Titus 2:3,4).

- **God intended for us to value relationships.** We are in a relationship with God, who is described as our father. We are also to love one another and live in community with each other, which we know is beneficial to ageing well (Galatians 4:4-7; John 13:34). God intends that we maintain a personal relationship with Him through prayer, which can also be a great source of comfort to us.
- **We should be generous.** The Bible teaches that ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). Followers of the Christian faith share a passion for caring for others in need, and this has had a remarkable impact on people worldwide, since the days of the early Christian church. It is no coincidence that many of the not-for-profit aged care providers and providers of palliative care services are those with a Christian ethos.
- **We should be forgiving,** because the ‘Lord forgave you’ (Colossians 3:12-13). A willingness for forgiveness and reconciliation in relationships, as well as for your own past failures and shortcomings can bring freedom to the present and stop a tendency to ruminate on the past.
- **We are to be grateful and give thanks,** trying to do good for each other and to ‘give thanks in all circumstances’ (1 Thessalonians 5:15–18). Being thankful, even for the little things, can shape our attitudes, helping us to have a more positive outlook, even when things aren’t going to plan.

## **Outwards and upwards, not inwards**

As we age, the temptation is for us to be focused on ourselves and our immediate family and friends. Changes to our health and financial circumstances – even the loss of family and friends – may cause our lives to ‘narrow’, and we can become negative in our thinking.

But being outward in our thinking supports positive ageing, and being focused on others, not just when all is well, but also at other times. This is the very fabric of Christian living: ‘Therefore as we have opportunity let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.’ (Galatians 6:10).

This sounds fine when we are in good health and reasonably active, but it can also be true for us when we face less than ideal circumstances.

This is because the Christian worldview has a ‘double focus’ where we can be looking outwards in our thinking because we are also upward in our focus. It seems counter intuitive, but when Jesus speaks about discipleship he says: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.’ (Matthew 16:24,25). The path to positive ageing is by serving both the Lord Jesus and his people. This service will go far beyond our own geography and social context as we recognise that it is God’s world, and his people are from every nation and social group on earth.

Because the Christian life is a response of faith and gratitude to all that God has done, there can be a positivity even in the midst of the worst of health experiences or even, perhaps especially, when we ourselves or a loved one faces the diagnosis and experience of dementia (more on dementia below). The Christian hope does not depend on a person’s grasp of it, nor is it diminished when bedridden, or when facing crippling illness. A person can still live a life of positive ageing, and even of serving through loving those around them, at home or in the nursing home or in the hospital bed. No-one pretends that this is easy: there is good evidence that the actress Bette Davis (1908-1989) owned a pillow with the slogan: ‘Old Age Ain’t No Place for Sissies’ so presumably older people have been toughing it out for a while.

## **The second temptation we face as we age is to look back rather than looking forward.**

### **Looking forward not looking back**

The second temptation we face as we age is to look back rather than look forward. This is especially the case if a person thinks they have nothing to look forward to. For many, looking forward means the possible experience of increasing illness and/or loneliness, decreased independence and then death itself. It is no wonder that euthanasia seems an attractive proposition to some people.

As looking forward is something we are hesitant to do, we may tend to focus on the past by looking back, though this will not necessarily bring a positive mindset. It may do so, as we recall past loves and life highlights, but it may also bring attention to what we used to be able to do and can no longer manage. We may rehearse all the mistakes we’ve made and the opportunities we’ve missed and end up with a bitter outlook on life. I well

remember my grandfather ended his life in this way. About two years before his death, he had a slight stroke which limited his mobility. So, each day he spent recalling all the people who had treated him poorly financially (and there was a number) and he became more and more bitter.

The present for many of us may also feel negative when we think of the world around us. As we watch the TV, listen to the radio and read our newspapers (and look at our phones!) we can be overwhelmed by wars, by climate change and by the state of our society. As we are flooded with every problem in the world, we become anxious for our families and our nation and see no reason for being positive.

How can believers be positive about looking forward? Those with faith in Jesus can be confident about their own future as they hear the words of Paul in Colossians: ‘... since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.’ (3:1). Believers can also be confident about the future of the world as they remember that it will be ‘liberated from its bondage to decay’, so that there will be a new heaven and new earth, that is, a new universe (Revelation 21).

It is the place that is the true home for those with Christ, prepared for them by God the creator through Jesus Christ. This positive hope is wonderfully conveyed in the last book in the Narnia series by C.S. Lewis: ‘I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now ... Come further up, come further in!’ (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

## **Dementia and the Christian worldview**

People living with dementia are not forgotten in a Christian worldview. In his book *Dementia: Living in the memories of God* (Eerdmans, 2012), theologian John Swinton re-frames our understanding of personhood when someone has lost their cognitive capacity. The Christian worldview teaches that personhood is grounded in being created and held by God, not in one’s cognitive abilities. Even when someone forgets who they are, God does not forget them—they “remain tightly held within the memories of God”. Swinton also provides a lot of practical help for those who care for someone living with dementia, showing how to care well, understand personhood, and build meaningful relationships. See the link on our website [thepositiveageingequation.com](http://thepositiveageingequation.com) for details of where you find a copy of *Living in the memories of God*.

## **THE BEST IS YET TO BE**

As we conclude this brief reflection, it is worth asking again whether it is possible to be positive about ageing apart from being positive that ageing is inevitable! The Christian answers 'yes', but not by looking inward to personal development, as important and useful as this may be, and not by improvement in health through diet and exercise, as essential as they may be to our present and future enjoyment. But the answer is 'yes,' because for a Christian, the future hope rests entirely on the promises of God through Jesus Christ, his eternal Son, and because the present is given purpose and meaning as they seek to serve Jesus out of gratitude for the grace that he has poured into their lives.

Here is an anecdote to finish. Some years ago, I was the senior minister in an Anglican parish in Sydney. There was an older couple who had had a wonderful life of serving God's people. The husband, in particular, did not enjoy good health so his daily routine was to stay in bed surrounded by current information about all the people he supported in prayer and to pray through that extensive list. About mid-morning his wife would bring him a cup of tea. One morning she came in and there he was with all his prayer material, but he had passed away while praying. It was a most graphic moment of positive ageing - one moment with the Lord Jesus in prayer and the next moment in the very presence of the one to whom he was praying.

We may not all have this experience of dying but for the Christian, positive ageing is a possibility in and through Jesus.

# OUR POSITIVE AGEING EQUATION AND THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

## INTRINSIC CAPACITY DOING POWER

Hope that transcends ill health and even death is found in a Christian worldview that values people and their contribution at every stage of life. This hope can strengthen intrinsic capacity by helping older people avoid a narrowing of their lives.



## ENVIRONMENT OUTSIDE HELP

At the heart of a Christian view of positive ageing is the knowledge that we can live by grace-gratitude - initiated out of love of God in Jesus - rather than a performance-reward approach where everything is earned. This grace is the ultimate 'outside help'.



## FUNCTIONAL ABILITY GETTING THINGS DONE

With a hopeful openness to the world while ageing, and a greater access to gratitude as a result of grace, the limitations of ageing tend to be minimised, releasing greater ability to get the important things of life done - enjoying the life we've been given and serving others.

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