I have a bone to pick with B.J.Thomas. He sang “the sweetness of my youth just grew with age.” Unexpected aches and pains could be called many things but sweetness does not come to mind. Now not being able to keep up I would not describe as sweet. Needing to make more trips to the doctor than ever before is not a sweet thing to me.

Of course he maybe referring to 2 Co 4:16 “Therefore we do not become discouraged [spiritless, disappointed, or afraid]. Though our outer self is [progressively] wasting away, yet our inner self is being [progressively] renewed day by day.” As a part of humanity our outward man is perishing, but as Christians our inner man never grows old. But the fact remains, our outward man wastes away.

Christopher Columbus said “Following the light of the sun, we left the old world.” If we just change one word it talks to Christians. “Following the light of the Sun, we left the old world.”

I have been considering getting older. As Mark Twain said, “When your friends begin to flatter you on how young you look, it's a sure sign you're getting old.” Trouble is, no one has ever said that to me. I just look old.

Unless something untoward happens then it is inevitable for us all. My silver hair used to be a point of difference (I had silver hair in my 20’s) and now it is a point of sameness (most older people have silver hair). We hear continually that it is a young person’s world. Much advertising is geared to young people. The way things are done is often only to accommodate older people until they are out the way.

Yet the Bible says in Joel 2:28 “your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” I did point out to a lady it did not say women but men. She rightly pointed out the term includes both men and women. I guess it is a double-edged sword. Old is old whether it is a man or a woman.

I love how in our fellowship there is an “Armchair” ministry. It is a prayer thing headed up by someone who is almost 100 years old. They want to do something, and they can. Their role is as important as someone on the front line. The last thing a person needs to feel is they are not useful. For a start it is not true. God never said it. Unregenerate man implies it. But Mahatma Gandhi spoke truly when he said, “Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action.”

We hear commonly these days “the exuberance of youth.” There is no doubt the world will be theirs. It does not mean for me there is no role for older people. It is not like the movie Carousel, where a buzzer went off when someone was 30 and that was the end of them. Ira Gershwin put it well. “Old age adds to the respect due to virtue, but it takes nothing from the contempt due to vice; it whitens only the hair.”

God has a role for older people. It seems currently we are seeing so many ministers retire. Some are happy to fade off into the sunset, while others are frustrated. They still want to do heaps but physically they know they cannot do what they once did. Sometimes ill-health puts paid to any ideas of spreading the wings.

Yet to me there is so much untapped potential tied up in older people (of course that is easy for me to say as I am one of them now)

I ask myself, “what is the role of older people in the kingdom of God?” There are, no doubt, many other verses that give an idea, and I sure would like to consider them, but these are the ones I see now.

In 1 Kings 12:13, Solomon’s son Rehoboam forsook the advice of the older men his dad had consulted and chose the advice of younger people instead. The kingdom was divided at that point. Although anyone young or old can give good advice, there is a wisdom that can come with experience, and that advice is ignored at one’s peril. I think it is important to establish why something is said. Just because someone is older does not make their advice automatically good.

The Bible tells us that “old men will dream dreams.” One of the characteristics of dreaming seems to be sleep. Even in the Bible people had dreams when they slept. A person does not need to be old to dream, but everyone needs to be asleep when they dream. In Gen 37:5-8 Joseph had a dream and his brothers resented it. But it was a God thing.

If my experience is anything to go by then sleep seems to be a favoured domain of the old. So many elderly “go for a kip.” It was never really considered when younger, but when older the day is planned around getting a kip.

To me dreaming is not to be despised. So often God used a dream to communicate with people. I love how in Gen 20 God says to Abimelech in a dream “you’re a dead man.” Solomon was given his wisdom when God appeared to him in a dream (1 Kngs 3:5)

Personally, I reckon the key to dreaming God dreams is staying close to God. He wants to reveal His will to us (think Abraham interceding for Sodom, or Daniel praying and Michael’s battle to get to him). His pre-requisite is not an older person, or a younger person, but an available person.

I love what Tolkien says’ “All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost; the old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost.” Or as Theodore Roosevelt said I am sure tongue in cheek, “Old age is like everything else. To make a success of it, you’ve got to start young.”

Older people may not be able to build, but they can maintain.