



GOOD FAITH READ ALONG

COUNTING YOUR DAYS

*Dan Allender: Why diminishment is
the doorway, not the end.*

A companion guide to Good Faith episode 233.

Have you watched a parent age and felt a quiet panic rise – not just for them, but for yourself? Have you found yourself bristling at the mailers from AARP, watching gray creep into the mirror, or feeling your knees announce themselves on the stairs?

Or maybe you are decades from any of that, but you can already feel the low hum of a question you can't quite put down: what am I supposed to do with the fact that I am running out of time?

Our recent conversation with Dan Allender sits with that question – and what he offers is something almost no one in our culture is offering: a vision of aging that is not a slow defeat but a slow becoming.

This guide is to help you go deeper into that conversation. Use it alone, with a spouse, with a small group, or with the parent or child the topic has been quietly pressing on.

Take your time. The whole point is that there is no shortcut to counting your days well.

The closer you get to death, the less the things that owned you seem to matter.

DR. DAN ALLENDER



COUNTING YOUR DAYS AT ANY AGE.

There is one absolute certainty about your future, as Curtis put it at the start of the conversation: you will be older than you are now. You can bet the farm on that prediction. And yet our entire culture is organized to help you forget it – seventy is the new sixty, sixty is the new fifty.

Dan offers a different posture, rooted in Psalm 90: count your days, that you may grow in wisdom. The line is usually read as a counsel for the elderly, but Dan insists it is for everyone. Counting your days is not a morbid practice. It is the practice of taking your one, precious life seriously.

And it does not mean projecting forward into a future you cannot know. It means looking back – at where you have come from, what has shaped you, what you have carried – so that what comes next is met with something other than reflex. This is the work of any honest spiritual life, but it becomes unavoidable as the body begins to insist on it. We might be wise to begin now.

SCRIPTURE FOR THE COUNTING

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. PSALM 90:12

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me." GENESIS 16:13



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- **Dan points to the angel's two questions to Hagar in Genesis: 'Where have you come from? Where are you going?'- the questions any of us can ask, at any age, questions aging eventually asks for us.**
- **When you imagine your own aging, what is the first emotion that rises? Resistance, sadness, indifference, curiosity? Where do you think that response comes from?**
- **Look around at the people in your life who are ten or twenty years older than you. How are they navigating this season? What do you want to learn from them, and what do you want to do differently?**

DIMINISHMENT IS NOT THE ENEMY.

The most counterintuitive reframe in the conversation comes when Dan describes his own seventies as the happiest period of his life. Not because the body still cooperates – it doesn't – but because the diminishment itself clears space for things he has not previously seen. He moves slower, and he sees more. He cannot do everything, so he has to choose what actually matters. The shrinking of capacity produces an expansion of attention.

Curtis names this a wholesale reframe of diminishment – an antidote to the dominant narrative which says our loss of capacity is sincerely bad, when in fact the losing of some things is what makes the keeping of other things possible.

We are not promised to stay forever young. What does Scripture promise? Psalm 92 says those who pursue righteousness will stay fresh and green even as everything else slows down – the opposite of the brittleness we usually associate with age.

SCRIPTURE FOR THE REFRAMING

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree... They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

PSALM 92:12, 14



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- **Where in your life do you treat a loss of capacity as sincerely bad? What might it look like to ask instead what that loss is making room for?**
- **Dan names brittleness – getting more rigid, more dogmatic, more cautious – as the spiritual danger of aging. Where do you feel it stirring in yourself, even now?**

RETIREMENT AS VERB, NOT ADJECTIVE.

There is a vision of retirement so widespread in American culture. We barely notice our absorption of it: more golf, more cruises, more time to ourselves, a reward for forty years of work. Dan is bracing about this – not because golf or cruises are wrong, but because they cannot hold the weight of a human life as its meaning.

Curtis offers a useful distinction: the word "empty" is both adjective and verb. As an adjective, an empty retirement is what we fear and what we sometimes get. As a verb, to empty oneself is something else entirely: the giving away of what you have gained, the spending of your gifts on others while you still have them to spend.

Dan invokes the haunting end of Schindler's List – the ring that could have saved one more – to name the regret that comes from confusing the two. The invitation of aging is not to spend your remaining time on yourself, but to discover you have accumulated something worth giving – and that the giving is the gift.

SCRIPTURE FOR THE EMPTYING

Christ Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- **If you have already retired, or are nearing it, what story have you been telling yourself about what these years are for? Is it a story of acquiring or a story of giving?**
- **What is one gift, skill, or kind of attention you have accumulated that someone younger could genuinely use right now? Who is that someone – and what is keeping you from offering it?**

THE REVERSAL OF CARE.

Few transitions in adult life are harder than the tables turning – when we begin to parent our own parents as they age. Almost nothing in the early decades of that relationship prepares either of you for the reversal. Dan calls the sandwich years – launching children on one side, tending parents on the other – the most egregiously difficult period of life. If you are in that season, you are not failing to handle something easy.

Dan offers a small story to make the point. After shoulder surgery, he was dragging the trash out because he could not lift it. His son asked him a single question: What would it cost you to let me lift it? Dan, in his own telling, wanted to smack him. And then, he received what his son was offering. The cost was the admission of how much he needed help – and how much more he would need it as time went on.

The reversal of care does not have to be a humiliation. It can be shared honesty and mutual honor. People die as they live, Dan notes; the angry father tends to go out angrily, the needy mother more needy. Which means the work of facing reality together cannot wait. It is now.

SCRIPTURE FOR THE REVERSAL

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land EXODUS 20:12

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. ISAIAH 46:4



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- **If you are caring for an aging parent: what would it look like to honor them without slipping into dishonesty? What truth has gone unspoken between you that might still be spoken in love?**
- **If you are the one being cared for, or beginning to be: what would it cost you to let someone serve you? And what might it give you to let them?**
- **How has watching a parent age changed the way you think about your own?**

THE INNER AGE YOU CARRY.

Curtis names something many of us recognize the moment we hear it: We carry an inner age that does not change. Fifty-eight in the mirror feels like twenty-nine somewhere underneath, and the gap between them is disorienting. Dan notes the age we often default to lives somewhere in the late twenties or early thirties – the age of launching, of vitality, of a future that still felt open.

Curtis's inner twenty-nine is not only about vitality. It clings to the unlimited potential he had been told he carried as a child – and the impossibility of ever fulfilling it. The age at which the promise was still ahead, still unmet, still pressing on him as a kind of debt. The inner age, in other words, can be both a gift and a wound.

Dan's response is tender. The work of counting your days, he says, includes tending to the younger self you carry. Going back to that twenty-nine-year-old or sixteen-year-old and saying: I am sorry for the wisdom you did not own. I am grateful for the burgeoning you offered. And I am here now, doing what you could not yet do.

SCRIPTURE FOR THE TENDING

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

PSALM 147:3



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- **What is your inner age? When you picture yourself, how old are you in that picture, regardless of what the mirror says?**
- **What was happening in your life at that age? What gift were you carrying then? What burden?**
- **If you could speak now to that younger self, what would you say?**

IN CLOSING

**LET THE BODY'S SLOWING MAKE
ROOM FOR THE SOUL'S WIDENING.**

If you came to this guide tired of fighting time – unsure how to think about a season that keeps arriving whether you welcome it or not – the most honest thing this guide can say is what Dan said near the end:

The elderly carry stories almost no one wants to mine. When we do mine them, we receive a quiet map of what is coming for us. Sit with the ones who have gone further down the road. Ask the questions no one is asking them.

Count your days. Empty yourself into the people around you. And when your own season of being asked for arrives, let yourself be asked. Something grows in counted days. It does not grow because we resisted them. It grows because we received them.

[LISTEN TO THE CONVERSATION HERE](#)

