



*Green Leaves for
Later Years:
The Spiritual Path
of Wisdom*
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In *Green Leaves for Later Years* Emilie Griffin reflects on aging and the ways the Christian faith informs the new challenges that come with it, like physical pain, loss, new goals, sustaining friendships, eternity. Her goal is to help those living in the later years discover how to live deeply and well.

Green Leaves for Later Years

When someone lives to be ninety-two we're inclined to think they were granted an extra decade. In fact that is what the Bible says: "For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life" (Prov 9:11). However, what matters isn't so much the accomplishments of those ten years. The main thing about an extra decade is the perspective gained, both for those who live long and others who observe them.

When I picture these extra years of long life I don't immediately think of a happy, fulfilled person sitting in a rocking chair and receiving visitors. Instead, what comes to mind is more like a chase scene in a movie with Matt Damon playing Jason Bourne. The driver is maneuvering against oncoming traffic, and the likelihood of collision is high. With split-second timing he swerves to avoid obstacles, but his instincts are amazingly sure. The accumulated experience of a lifetime gives him very sharp judgment, uncanny skill. He moves with a kind of dead-on certainty toward what he is chasing. Life, in this scenario, is an obstacle course, and the winners are those who skirt the worst of it.

At the same time the person in question gives way to reality. He or she can't predict exactly what lies ahead. The oncoming traffic of existence is part of the joy, part of the challenge and excitement. Not only that: the heart surrenders and lets go.

Two older people I have worked with in Renovaré are William Vaswig and Roger Fredrikson. Vaswig, a Lutheran pastor and a prayer-healer, died in his late seventies after dealing for many years with a heart ailment. He had multiple stents in his heart. Fredrikson, a pastor who recently turned ninety, has struggled with forms of cancer. Sometimes he is in remission. Sometimes the cancer returns. Always Fredrikson lives joyfully with simple trust in God.

Both of these men are known for strong faith. Their constant drive along the obstacle course of living seems to show unerring skill. I loved to be with them to share their childlike vitality and joy. Both men reminded me to enjoy the adventure of living. They seem to relish the unexpected. I think it is all about trust, trusting God with the arc of their lives, the trajectory of their existence.

—Adapted from chapter one, *"Pushing Past the Pain"*