I’ve discovered that life brings us all times of pain, failure and grief, plus our struggles with fear, our worth and our identity. Those things can define us, if we allow them to. They can rob our joy and hope. There is an alternative. Surrender it all to Jesus. He will take that stuff that so easily robs us. We’ll experience being loved by God so we can love God. We’ll walk free, to better look at life and love other people, as God enables us to have same perspective as Jesus does.

Forrest Gump is a great film. I’m sure we can all relate to this quote about life—

"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get."

Has your life been like that?

God’s Word rightly tells us: There is a right time for everything: A time to be born; a time to die; a time to plant; a time to harvest. A time to heal; a time to rebuild; a time to cry; a time to laugh and a time to grieve. Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Come with me as we explore the four Seasons of Life and some practical insights to help us enjoy all God offers us in our life.
The season of learning—
We enter this world and begin exploring and learning about our surroundings. Babies discover their hands; learn to grasp things and learn to crawl and walk. Our first 20 years are primarily focused on learning and developing our identity.

This critical season of life shapes the rest of our life—

- If our parents give us dependable affection, our view of the world will be one of trust. If that does not happen, a child may develop a sense of mistrust in people. That leads to frustration, suspicion, withdrawal and a lack of confidence.

- Wise parents provide encouragement, so the child takes risks and learns independence, which builds confidence. However we are fragile people: if we’re “putdown” as a child, we may develop shame and doubt about our ability to handle life and problems.

- During the early teen years, boys and girls ask the question: "Do I have what it takes? Do I have the courage, skills and friends to help me really make it in life?” Parents are crucial in validating their son or daughter as teens often feel they don’t have what it takes to be a man or woman.

- Many fail to hear that deep encouragement. Too many hear: “You are useless and you’ll never make it!” That crushes the spirit of teens and they go into adulthood looking OK, but internally they are wounded and wanting someone to validate their worth and help give them an identity.

We now seek a partner…

An old man told his grandson, “There is a battle between two wolves inside all of us. One is Evil.

It is anger, jealousy, lies, resentment, greed, ego and inferiority. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth.”

The boy thought about it and asked, “Grandfather, which wolf wins?”

“The one you feed,” he said.
Having established our identity, we’re ready to make long-term commitments to others. We start forming **loving relationships**—our parents are usually our role models. We make the sacrifices that loving relationships require. If we have unresolved emotional damage from earlier stages of life, it will often undermine caring relationships and we may retreat into emotional isolation.

"**The greatest fear in the world is of the opinions of others. And the moment you are unafraid of the crowd you are no longer a sheep, you become a lion. A great roar arises in your heart, the roar of freedom.**"

- Osho

**Freedom comes as I accept what GOD says about me—**

**GOD’S WORD:** What marvellous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—**we’re called children of God**! That’s who we really are. Let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism. God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.

Once that’s done and we’re no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we’re bold and free before God! **This is how God showed his love for us:** God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. Not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God. If God loved us like this, we certainly ought to **love each other.**

1 John 3:1,18-21, 4:10,11
The season of earning—
It is in this season that we begin to build a life. We may find our life partner, start a family, buy a home and begin to accumulate possessions. In this season the focus is usually on us. In building our careers we gain valuable experience to help us in work and life.

If we are wise, we’ll have already discovered that quality of life—for now and eternity—is secured through a fair dinkum friendship with Jesus. That will shape how we invest our time, skills and money.

In a culture where the media ‘preach’ our worth comes from things, many walk the road of self-reliance. We use our career to develop our worth by improving our personal “brand image.” Life is rushed: we give the bulk of our energy to moving onward and upward.

If our identity and worth are not secure in God we’ll find we are vulnerable. Our children can emotionally manipulate us—they may actually drive the decisions we make, as we want our family and friends to think: “Wow, look at how successful they are.”

A healthy marriage involves leaving our childhood home. As Genesis 2:24 says: A man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh. Our relationships are stronger as—

- We choose to give, rather than take.
- Forgive, rather than hold grudges.
- As we ask questions of those with godly wisdom, we are enriched.
- Celebrate life, honour people and have an attitude of humility.
- Rest secure in God’s love for us so in our emotional security, we can serve.

During this season, the transition from learning to earning can be challenging. We’ll have stuffups. People will wound us. Internally, as we continue to deal with our emotional issues, God will brilliantly help us, as we welcome his love and strength.
Nick Vujicic says:

“Faced with countless challenges and obstacles, God has given me the strength to surmount what others might call impossible. My life is given to sharing this same hope and genuine love that I have personally experienced with people all over the globe. I’ve been invited into very unexpected places to share about my faith in Jesus Christ and literally millions have responded.

Travelling to over 44 countries, I’ve been extremely humbled by the opportunities to introduce Jesus to those I meet. Psalm 139:13,14 says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

In countless schools, churches, prisons, orphanages, hospitals and in face-to-face encounters with individuals, I get to tell them how precious they are to God.”  

For more: www.lifewithoutlimbs.org

Working through issues

Nick is a true inspiration. Born in 1982 with no arms or legs, this Aussie guy could easily have allowed his physical disability to define him. Nick chooses to allow God to actively help him daily overcome his issues and help others.
The season of returning—
At some point, most of us will begin to tire of the pace of our *earning season* or a significant life event will lead us to question: “Is there something more to life?” We may achieve our goals and make it to the top and having climbed the ladder of success, we realize it was leaning against the wrong building.

At this point we’re at a crossroads. We call it a **mid-life crisis**. Some people miss the opportunity to evaluate their life and deal with their internal emotional stuff or relational issues. They continue to **focus on themselves**. They trade in their spouse for a newer model or seek to recapture their youth in other self-destructive ways. In doing so they ruin families, friendships, careers and lives. *We’ve all seen this.*

> “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
> Jeremiah 29:11

Focusing on **significance** and **serving** into what matters in the **long term** takes the focus off of us. Discovering our **true worth** is from our friendship with God and it’s nurtured by our spiritual journey (this is far more than just *doing church*). If we take this ‘fork in the road’, it will lead to character growth and joy, rather than self-destruction.

We’ll also be dealing with being part of the “**sandwich generation**”—a term used to describe the middle-aged generation squeezed between the **simultaneous demands** of caring for our ageing parents and also giving support to our children as they begin parenting. In addition, in the later stages of our working career, the **workplace** is radically changing. We can feel we’re becoming redundant in a **digital world**.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational attitudes in work and life</th>
<th><strong>Veterans</strong> (1922-45)</th>
<th><strong>Boomers</strong> (1946-64)</th>
<th><strong>Generation X</strong> (1965-80)</th>
<th><strong>Generation Y</strong> (1981-2000)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work ethic and Values</strong></td>
<td>Hard work</td>
<td>Workaholics</td>
<td>Eliminate task</td>
<td>What’s next?</td>
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<td>Respect for authority</td>
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<td>Multi tasking</td>
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<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Fight issues</td>
<td>Like structure</td>
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<td>Duty first</td>
<td>Personal fulfilment</td>
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<td>Stick to rules</td>
<td>Seek quality</td>
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<td>Question authority</td>
<td>Often cynical</td>
<td>Goal orientated</td>
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</tbody>
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| **Making contact**                     | Formal Letter/Memo     | In person            | Direct Immediate            | Email Voicemail               |

| **Feedback Rewards**                   | No news is good news   | We don’t appreciate it | Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing? | Whenever I want it, at the push of a button |
|                                        | Satisfaction in job that’s well done | Money Title gives recognition | Freedom is the best reward | Meaningful life |

In this season, we have an active life, but our focus is off things and more on relationships. We have opportunity to constructively work through any issues with our parents from our past, eg: resentment, anger and jealousy. Relationships transition with our children. We may find they need us less as their careers take off—causing a sense of rejection for us. We also need to guard against stagnation—our brain going into ‘autopilot’, when we need to rethink life’s meaning.
CRISIS POINTS IN OUR LIFE AT THIS SEASON MAY LEAD TO US:

- Changing our job, spouse, or where we live
- Leaving our church as it’s not answering our life questions
- Becoming depressed from menopause or singleness
- Awareness that retirement and my final season is near. This triggers a search to ensure that after our life, we have left a significant legacy of people we’ve mentored or achievements that outlive us
- Internal confusion if my identity isn’t secure or my emotional pain isn’t resolved
- Financial struggles that add tension to my next season

**PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS**

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is error, truth
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is darkness, light
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console
To be understood, as to understand
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
However, this winter season is the major time of loss in our life. We all face—

1. Loss of our youth
2. We lose our job and work connections
3. Loss of the world that has been familiar
4. Loss of our home as we shift to aged care
5. The loss of our independence
6. Loss of our sense of value to other people
7. Death comes and we lose spouse/friends
8. Decline in our health

In a culture where our worth is often valued for what we do, the final decades of our life are more difficult unless we are valued, loved and respected for who we are by people we love.
We walk the road knowing our value to God and secure in our friendship with Him. O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up.

You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.

You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me.

You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there...even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me...even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous.

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!

And when I wake up, you are still with me!

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. Psalm 139.
It can be so easy to enjoy being passive—sleeping like our border collie. It is important to think and plan for our future needs. Stuff like where we’ll live—the transition from family home to a self care village or aged care. It’s easy to procrastinate and live day to day.

However, this frustrates our families, because we won’t let any one help us tidy up our house; throw out decades of our accumulated stuff; or actively plan the next stage of our own care. Living in denial of reality means we have abdicated from being responsible, so we become a disaster waiting to happen. Is that a wise choice?
As we become senior citizens we tend to slow down our productivity and explore life as a retired person. It is during this time that we contemplate our life. If we see our life as unproductive, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we may be dissatisfied with life and have a sense of despair, often leading to depression.

Studies show that the effects of aging are minimized by staying:
- mentally alert
- intellectually curious
- physically active

How?

- A healthy lifestyle—body, spirit and mind—helps reduce stress and maintain health. There are activities that cost little and can be done alone or with friends that give us a lift, and help us while dealing with emotional distress or mental illness.

- We’re wise to maintain our friendship with God; social customs; old relationships; family connections. We can also develop new relationships and be involved with our grand children. Explore community organizations, senior citizens centers, day respite programs, social support outings and church small groups or volunteer in the community and we gain enjoyment from life.

- Ensure we don’t confuse relationships with issues. Too often I see a parent have a squabble with their adult child over an issue. In anger or frustration, the older adult breaks the relationship eg: “I’ll cut you out of my will,” or “don’t come here anymore,” etc.

Best way forward is always to forgive them. In doing that we release our self and the other person from us wanting to hit back. We can’t control what people do to us, but we can choose to not re-live that hurt. We can invite God to help us with the pain, give it to him—and our sense of injustice.

The world is imperfect. It always takes two to have a squabble. We can focus forwards and make the best of this winter season as we forgive. Let go of past stuff and give our self permission to enjoy life.
1. Grieving
There are numerous losses we adults face as we age. Changes in our economic, social and personal status related to our job; retirement; decline in health and the death of friends. The death of a spouse or other loved ones can be a profound loss, bringing on a grief process that may cause changes in our thinking, mood and behaviour.

There are phases of grieving:

**Denial**: We express disbelief or inability to acknowledge the loss of the person we love.

**Anger**: We get cranky loss happened to us. We’re alone and we feel deserted.

**Bargaining**: To try and regain some normal life, we make “deals” in an effort to make life better for us.

**Depression**: We feel despair or hopelessness overcome us.

**Acceptance**: Over time, we move beyond the loss and begin to resume our previous activities and behaviour.

*How long it takes often depends on us being willing to grieve well. Let it out.*

These stages are normal reactions to a loss, and should pass over time. If a person does not seem to get to the acceptance stage or shows prolonged signs of depression (longer than two weeks), pop into your GP for a chat. While grief and loss is emotionally difficult, many older adults adapt to the changes in their life and regain a sense of joy and happiness. The support of family, friends, chaplains and health professionals can aid in this process. *We’re there to help.*

2. Depression
Depression is common among older adults—about 20% of people over 65. It’s *not* a normal part of the ageing process and should not be ignored. Depression is often linked with medical problems or life traumas. Good news: depression is an easily treatable health issue.
Questions to ask yourself:
In the past month, I have been—
• Upset at having little interest or pleasure in doing things?
• Troubled by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
• Had difficulty sleeping or poor appetite and weight loss?
• Felt irritated by little things?

A “yes” means we’re wise to talk to a GP. They assess our feelings and help us determine what help is beneficial.

Treatment—Many antidepressants exist and 65–80% of people will respond to the medication. Counselling is a useful part of treatment.

3. Anxiety Disorders
They are common for older people: 11% of those over 55 are dealing with an anxiety disorder. This is more than occasional moments of nervousness, an increased pulse rate, sweaty palms, or a queasy stomach. A sign we have serious anxiety is when the symptoms persist, or are so severe they interrupt our normal activities.

Treatment includes verbal therapies, such as cognitive behaviour therapy; relaxation techniques or medication.

4. Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia
Over 332,000 Australians are living with dementia. Three in ten people over the age of 85 and almost one in ten people over 65 have dementia. The disease varies among each individual. In many cases, the younger the person is at the start of symptoms, the faster the disease progresses. For the carer, we see the slow erosion of the person we loved. Alzheimer’s can be called “the long goodbye.”
The person with Alzheimer's will experience stages as the disease progresses. *If our life is like a house, it’s being slowly demolished.*

**Early Stages.** There is gradual memory loss (short-term memory is affected) and our behaviour and personality changes.

**Middle Stages.** The ability to perform routine tasks remains, while orientation to time, person and place, judgment and our abstract thinking will be affected.

**Last Stages.** This disease will eventually leave a person requiring total care in the last stages.

*Treatment*—When initially diagnosed, a person with Alzheimer's disease may respond best when cared for at home by family and with community support services when possible. If severe dementia makes it too difficult or unsafe to care for an individual in their own home, then a residential program such as an assisted living facility or nursing home with a specialized unit designed to care for people with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders is our best option.

*Mother Teresa:* “Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love, than in your own weakness.”
We never need to teach kids how to have fun. They love stuff like splashing in a big puddle of water. They see such joy in life.

As we age, if we believe our “going home” is death and then we rot, there is no joy to anticipate—only deep sadness. However, if we have the confident hope of eternity with Jesus and we have put our life in His care, then everything changes for the best.

In heaven, majestic angels sing: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come. You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power.” Revelation 4:8,11

Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. Our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. So we don’t look at the troubles we see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that can’t be seen. The things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we can’t see will last forever. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

I heard a loud shout from the throne, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” The one sitting on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Revelation 21:3-5

Acknowledgements—

More free booklets by Ross Wakeley—http://wakeley.weebly.com
Letter from a Mother to a Daughter

“My dear girl, the day you see I’m getting old, I ask you to please be patient, but most of all, try to understand what I’m going through. If when we talk, I repeat the same thing a thousand times, don’t interrupt to say: “You said the same thing a minute ago.” Just listen, please. Try to remember the times when you were little and I would read the same story night after night until you would fall asleep.

When I don’t want to take a bath, don’t be mad and don’t embarrass me. Remember when I had to run after you making excuses and trying to get you to take a shower when you were just a girl? When you see how ignorant I am when it comes to new technology, give me the time to learn and don’t look at me that way. Remember, honey, I patiently taught you how to do many things like eating appropriately, getting dressed, combing your hair and dealing with life’s issues every day. The day you see I’m getting old, I ask you to please be patient, and try to understand what I’m going through.

If I occasionally lose track of what we’re talking about, give me the time to remember, and if I can’t, don’t be nervous, impatient or arrogant. Just know in your heart that the most important thing for me is to be with you. And when my old, tired legs don’t let me move as quickly as before, give me your hand the same way that I offered mine to you when you first walked. When those days come, don’t feel sad, just be with me, and understand me while I get to the end of my life with love. I’ll cherish and thank you for the gift of time and joy we shared. With a big smile and the huge love I’ve always had for you, I just want to say, I love you...my darling daughter.”