



Johnese, wife of Potomac Network Superintendent, Ken Burtram, heads ELEMENT, Potomac Network Ministry Women and edits the **Element Connection**. She and Ken live in Warrenton, VA with two adolescent cats, Charlie and Lizzie.

His Grace at Work Over a Lifetime

Johnese Burtram

The matter of aging isn't of much consequence unless it happens to you. Everywhere I see promises to turn back the process - color to cover my gray, pricey creams, lotions, and serums to smooth away wrinkles, bronzers and blush and shimmer to make me glow, dietary supplements and wraps and exercises to tone and sculpt the body. Efforts to restrain the inevitable sound appealing, but I'm not sure I can spare the hours in my day necessary to reap the promised benefits.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul says, *"outwardly we are wasting away."* I am having serious issues with the "wasting away" part. I hear I am supposed to age gracefully. But since I've never been particularly graceful, it's not surprising that I am having trouble with this one. So I gracelessly whine about this "wasting" business.

At a meeting I attended last year, the speaker referred those faithful followers of Jesus who had been in Pentecost over fifty years. I clapped my hand over my mouth. "Oh my goodness, that's me." Yup, I have been around the block a few times. That means I am becoming well acquainted with the impending "wasting away" of advancing years. John Newton put it this way: *Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come*. I know these words as more than poetic expression. For me, they are up close and personal. Indeed, I have come through many troubles in this world, just like Jesus said I would. As a result, I have come to know some valuable truths.

I know the life-changing power of the Word.

Since age twenty-one, I have rarely gone through a day without reading the Bible. I know the power of the sharp, two-edged blade that divides between the thoughts and intentions of my heart. The scriptures reveal Jesus, provide a mirror for seeing my true self, enlighten God's promises, and instructs my mind with words of hope and light. Because of many years of exposure to the Word, scripture comes quickly to my mind in time of trouble. I am profoundly grateful for God's grace in making this the habit of my life.

I am eyewitness of God's protection and provision.

God's protecting presence has walked me step by step through the life-threatening illness of a child, through the emotional upheaval and rebellion of five teenagers, through potentially devastating church situations, through crushing circumstance in the lives of my grown children, through personal physical and emotional challenges, through times of discouragement. Jesus said "I will never leave you or forsake you." I have found Him to be present in every place, at all times, and in every circumstance.

His provision in my life over these many years is legendary. He has truly supplied all my needs – financial provision, timely guidance for important decisions, assistance at critical times, and perfect timing and dovetailed circumstances in more situations than I can even remember.

I know the absolute veracity of His promises.

I have lived long to see that seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness is just as he promised. When I put Christ and his kingdom first, he takes care of the "other things" I am so prone to worry about. I was young and now I am old(er.) Based on the authority of my experience I can testify that God never forsakes the righteous and He takes care of their children. I know I can give my burdens to the Lord and He will carry them and care for me.

I have found God to be faithful, His Word to be true, and His promise to be full of hope. I have found His love to be endless and His grace always great enough to cover me.

I must allow that as much as I squirm about the "wasting away" thing, I am full of hopeful anticipation about the daily inward renewal promised in juxtaposition to the "wasting away." *Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* (2 Corinthians 4:16) Day by day, I participate in the redemptive process of spiritual renewal.

I'm not getting older; I'm becoming "vintage" – better, more valuable, with the fine patina of aged furniture, and the maturing value of fine art.

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come.
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far
and grace will lead me home.*

I am ever trusting this grace that leads me home to work in my life the grace to flourish as the psalmist's cedar that stays fresh and green, bearing fruit in old age.