The Art of Finishing Well.

Finishing well doesn't mean having achieved everything we hoped for, having no regrets, or having a perfect family. It means learning to bring our lives, with all their joys, disappointments and unfinished business, into the hands of God.

Socialising

As socialising is important, widening our friendship base should be a high priority, as some of our present friends will die before us potentially leaving us lonely. Ideally, these friendships will span all ages. When you are with people, be careful not to talk too much about yourself and be sure to take an interest in others. If they are young people, use the opportunity to hone your mentoring skills, which basically means asking good questions and listening well.

When we moved to a new city, we found it hard to build a wide circle of friends, so we joined a group called 'Probus'. It was difficult at first, but after persevering for a year, and even going away with the group for five days, we now feel very much at home. Each month there are also many interest groups to join, and we have opted for ten-pin bowling and going out for coffee. I wonder if there is a suitable group for you to join.

Letting go gracefully, which is not giving up.

As we grow older, letting go of significant responsibilities can be a real challenge, especially when we are not ready to. It may mean stepping back from employment or from coaching a sports team as examples. If our lives have been built around these fulfilling roles, losing them can shake our sense of personal significance. It is harder still when we watch our successors make mistakes and no one wants to draw upon our experience. Yet, hard as it is, learning to move on is important otherwise we are in danger of losing our credibility.

Continuing to have purpose

One of the dangers of ageing is beginning to believe that our most useful years are behind us. But our purpose does not disappear when our employment, ministry responsibilities or physical capabilities diminish. Here are some ways we can contribute:

1. Encouraging younger people. As I neared my 70s, I was asked to look after an organisation. I was concerned about a couple of troubled teenage boys and wanted to spend time with each of them separately, asking about their hopes and future. I wondered why they would want to spend time with an older person, but to my amazement both accepted my invitation to have a drink, and they talked non-stop! We continued to meet repeatedly over the year.
2. Sharing wisdom from life's experiences. If you are invited to speak to a group, accept even if you feel inadequate. You could also write down your reflections, perhaps even in a book, as many people love reading biographies. It would make a lovely memento for your family.
3. Praying for family, friends and the wider world. There are plenty of needs there.
4. Being available to someone who needs companionship, whether through visits, phone calls or emails.
5. Visiting those in need. We visit a hospital twice a week to help the lonely and those anxious about their situation. The spin-off is that helping others is a blessing to us as well. And the list could go on and on.

Finishing spiritually well

The most important consideration is our relationship with God. Are we continuing to grow in our relationship with Christ? Are we learning to trust Him with the things we can no longer control? Have we made peace with God, ourselves and others? Is our faith becoming deeper, even as our physical strength diminishes?

Consider Psalm 92:14 'They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.'

Don't be glued to the TV. Eat well, get exercise and from a Christian perspective, finishing well means coming to the end of our earthly journey with faith, gratitude, peace, love and a sense that we have been faithful to what God entrusted to us.