

The Final Lap: Navigating the Transitions of Later Life

Wyatt, John. *The Final Lap: Navigating the Transitions of Later Life*. La Grange, KY: 10 Publishing, 2023, 80 pages.

While growing old happens naturally, aging is not easy. *The Final Lap* by John Wyatt is written to challenge and equip Christians facing later life, in this context being retirement and beyond).

In terms of structure, it has three clear chapters/movements with the title of each being self-explanatory: 'Hitting the Wall: Moving from work to retirement'; 'The Home Straight: Moving from independence to dependence' and 'The Finish Line: Moving from life to death'.

In terms of critique, *The Final Lap* has many more strengths than weaknesses. Its brevity (61 pages), easy reading style and large print all make it highly accessible. I also appreciated its engagement with both Scripture and the aged care literature. The middle chapter was exceptional in dealing with the topic of independence/dependency, which is a major topic given our culture's worship of independence. Spoiler alert: Wyatt emphasises that we are designed to be dependent! Indeed, this

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chapter alone justifies the cost of the book, although I did feel \$24 for 61 pages is unfortunate pricing.

Two other weaknesses are worthy of note. Firstly, there are three other Christian books which are comparable. *Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life* by John Chapman (Matthias Media, 2007) is another great short resource (57 pages). The major difference between the two is that *The Final Lap* is aimed at Christians while Chapman has an evangelistic focus. The second 'competitor' is *Finishing the Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with our Aging* by J.I. Packer, which focuses on the Bible and does not engage with the literature as *The Final lap* does. Finally, *Nearing Home* by Billy Graham (W Publishing Group, 2011), differs from both Chapman and Wyatt's books primarily on the basis of length (108 pages). As such, it has the space to cover more material than the others. However, being comparable to offerings from Chapmans, Packer, and Graham is perhaps more of a compliment than a weakness, and I recommend all four of these resources.

My more serious concern was two points of Wyatt's theology. Firstly, his position on joy - 'We should never forget that the race is ultimately all about joy'. Certainly, Piper argues "The meaning of life is to know God, and to enjoy God, and to reflect some of the beauty of God as we know him in Christ, and one day to see him perfectly and unendingly enjoy him." And Packer's focus agrees

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with Wyatt. Furthermore, as Wyatt notes, Jesus Himself pursued joy (Hebrews 12). However, I am not convinced Christian life is ‘**all** about joy’ (emphasis added).

More significantly I was concerned by Wyatt’s position that ‘The Christian faith teaches us that death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). And therefore, we should never welcome or hasten death’. Certainly, death enters creation as a direct consequence of the fall (Genesis 3) and I do not think we should hasten death. However, I would suggest a more nuanced reading of 1 Corinthians 15 which recognises Jesus redeems, or at least removes the sting of death. Additionally, the gospel accounts of Jesus’ death (particularly Matthew 27, Luke 23 and John 19) could be read to suggest He welcomed death. This also reconciles with Paul’s longing to die (Philippians 1). However, in both these points, *The Final Lap*’s brevity makes nuance challenging and if nothing else challenged my thinking on these points.

Despite these concerns, I strongly suggest reading *The Final Lap*. If you, or people you are working with, are approaching retirement and beyond, this resource is for you!

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