

How to Stay Renewed in the Spirit—Even in Old Age

This past weekend I preached at the historic Belmont Church in Nashville, Tennessee, a congregation that God used powerfully to spread charismatic renewal across the world in the 1970s. This was the church that gave us actor Pat Boone, Christian singers Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith, and many anointed songwriters and outreach ministries.

For years, Belmont was led by Don Finto, a brave spiritual pioneer who was willing to challenge old denominational mindsets after he had a profound experience with the Holy Spirit as a leader in the Church of Christ. Don “retired” from his pulpit at Belmont in 1996, but he didn’t even begin to slow down. He launched Caleb Company, an aptly-named ministry that focuses on mentoring and outreach to Middle Eastern countries.

I interviewed Finto on the phone for *Charisma* a few times over the years, but I met him for the first time last Sunday. He was seated on the second row, beaming with all the energy of a 30-year-old. I learned before the service that he is 89.

If you ask Finto his age, he emphatically says: “I’m 89 years young.”

My good friend Paul Gonzalez, who serves as Belmont’s teaching pastor, told me that Finto traveled to the Middle East last month with a team from the church. After the team finished their mission and flew back to the United States, Finto flew on to a few other countries. He is a true road warrior.

“Papa Don keeps the pace of a man half his age,” said Gonzalez. “He carries boundless joy. His laugh is deep and genuine, and nearly everything he says he does so with a hearty laugh.”

What's the secret to this kind of youthful energy in old age? Finto embodies principles that many of us need to grab now. Do you want to live long and finish strong? Here are a few tips:

1. **Keep yourself physically fit.** Unless you are intentional about exercising regularly and eating healthy now, your body won't be strong in your 90s. If you carry around a lot of extra weight in your 40s, your heart or joints may fail—even in your 50s. Make a decision today to treat your body like a temple of the Holy Spirit so you can live longer.
2. **Let God's passions become yours.** People who are consumed with God's purposes have an inner drive that renews them. Isaiah 40:31 says it best: "But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." An intentional focus on Jesus will give you extra energy—and the same boundless joy that makes Finto laugh so much.

British Christian leader George Mueller demonstrated this youthful energy in old age. When he was 70, he embarked on a 17-year period of missionary travel that took him to 33 countries. (This was before air travel, so he sailed on slow-moving ships.) It was his passion to share Christ with the world that kept Mueller moving at a frenetic pace until age 87. He died at 92.

3. **Hang around young people and invest in them.** Finto is known in Nashville as a mentor to younger leaders. Even though he turned Belmont Church over to his successors more than 20 years ago, he continues to provide coaching and fatherly counsel to the next generation. You are more likely to find him mentoring and worshiping with a group of 20-somethings than playing shuffleboard with retirees.

4. **Stay in step with the Holy Spirit.** Finto made a decision long ago to move with the cloud of the Holy Spirit. When the charismatic renewal hit this country in the 1970s, he didn't dig in his heels and cling to old religious wineskins. He broke away from Church of Christ traditions and moved the church into a season of fruitful growth.

Finto is a modern Caleb—and he reminds me of that biblical patriarch. Caleb said at age 85: “I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in.” Caleb never looked for a comfort zone. He never parked on yesterday's victories. He was always looking for the next challenge, and eager to embrace the new thing God is doing.

No matter how old you are, I hope you will decide to live a life of spiritual passion. Don't let life grow dull. Let the Holy Spirit renew your strength until your last breath.