



Published 2009

Scientists Still Hope to Find the Fountain of Youth

Editorial Comment by Warren Krug

A new Brad Pitt movie, based on a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, called *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* opened in theaters Christmas Day with an interesting plot. A baby is born with the body of a blind, decrepit old man. As he grows and matures mentally, his body develops in reverse, becoming younger with the years.

His first serious love affair occurs when physically he is 50. When he has acquired the body of a boy, he is beset with dementia. As an infant, he ends up back where he started, where, as Fitzgerald wrote, "there were only the white, safe walls of his crib."

Although this film which focuses on death and aging is only a fable, geneticists, gerontologists, and biologists are working to make the goal of slowing the processes of aging a reality.

British-based Aubrey de Grey is chairman of the Methuselah Foundation which is looking to defeat age-related disease and extend the healthy human life span. He imagines a future where people submit to periodic stem cell implants to refurbish older cells and gene therapies that would restore mutated DNA. But his critics explain that many discoveries have to be made before his dream can come true.

Other researchers are more modest in their goals. Dr. William Orr is tackling "oxidative stress," the "free radical" theory that the oxygen we breathe damages our cells. Cynthia Kenyon is studying caloric restriction or CR, a low calorie diet shown to extend the lives of worms, flies, mice and rats. However, neither approach has proven to be suitable or effective for humans.

This striving for a Fountain of Youth is nothing new, of course. Spanish explorer Ponce de León was said to have traveled through Florida in 1513 searching for it.

Medical science has made great strides in extending our life spans, but hasn't most of the progress come from preventing diseases such as polio and smallpox that prematurely end lives?

Some medical researchers have said there appears to be a built-in limit to how long humans can live. Yet, for Christian believers, there indeed is no limit. In heaven we will find our Fountain of Youth where we will live a 100% healthful eternity in communion without Savior, **LSI**

—Warren Krug, editor