

# Waiting for God : what the Bible says about retirement and growing old

## THE REALITY

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8	The seasons of life, a natural progression
Psalm 90:3-12	Moses, the man of God (Deuteronomy 34:7) You turn men back to dust (v3) We finish our years with a moan (v9) The length of our days (v10) Numbering our days - a heart of wisdom (v12)
Psalm 103:15-17	The compassion of God and his abiding love

## THE BLESSINGS

Psalm 92:12-15	Flourishing Fresh and green Fruit-bearing in old age
Psalm 37:25	Testimony to God's faithfulness
Psalm 143:5	Meditating on the past – a story to tell
Luke 2:25-37	Simeon and Anna Still spiritually alive and used by God Ready to depart - mission accomplished
Joshua 14:10-12	Caleb, still ready for battle
2Corinthians 4:6	Outward decline but inner renewal

"God wants to live in an old lady with grey hair and a bit of a stammer."

## THE CHALLENGES

"I never thought I would live to be this old. All my life I was taught how to die as a Christian, but no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die. I wish they had because I am an old man now, and believe me it's not easy. Whoever said it was right: old age is not for sissies." Billy Graham

Psalm 71	Written by an elderly person Deep-seated faith from infancy (v5-6) Fear of being abandoned by God: because of lack of strength (v9), and because he is old and grey (v18) BUT
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Intimacy with God (v3), an attitude of praise (vv22-24), a sense of purpose (v18), and hope of resurrection (v20-21)

John 21:18-19

Peter's future

Significant losses: independence, mobility and choice

Still the opportunity to glorify God, and to follow Jesus into a new season

1Timothy 6:6-8

A gradual stripping away

A finding of contentment in simplicity

### **FINISHING WELL**

2Timothy 4:6-8

A life poured out

Metaphors for ministry: soldier - athlete - steward

The time of 'departure'

The anticipation of reward

Numbers 8:23-26

Levites to retire at 50 from their regular service and work no more

They can assist their brothers but must not do the work

"There isn't anything wrong with retiring, and those years can be some of the best of our lives if we can see them as a gift from God. God rested on the seventh day after he had finished His work of creating the universe, and we shouldn't feel guilty if He gives us the opportunity to rest once our work is done." Billy Graham

Isaiah 46:4

The One who sustains us will not abandon us now

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## Thoughts about retirement

1. It is a pertinent topic because:
  - (a) so many baby boomers coming to the age of retirement
  - (b) those who thought they would retire at 60 may now have to wait until 67!

In Britain, 13.2 million are over 60  
More over 60s than under 18s  
Life expectancy for men is 78.8, for women 82.8

2. Retirement is a fairly recent concept, a privilege for those in developed nations - the idea that working life will finish in our 60s and there will be financial support into our later years. Some will welcome retirement with relief, others with regret.

3. Attitudes towards retirement vary:

- For some 'there is no retirement in the Bible'
- For others retirement is an opportunity to relax, enjoy oneself, do the things they have always wanted to do
- Perhaps the ideal is somewhere in-between with a slower pace of life, time for oneself, and yet opportunity to serve. Retirement is not an abdication of the call to service, but it is a God-given opportunity to adopt a different way of life in keeping with our season of life.
- As we grow older we want less responsibility and a slower pace; we also need to make room for a new generation of leaders.
- For some a 'phased' retirement may be appropriate, say 65-70 as semi-retirement, 70 onwards as fully retired.

4. For those engaged in cross-cultural ministry there may be particular issues:

- A reluctance to retire due to an over-identification with the host country and people, and a disassociation with the home country; a strong sense of calling and burden for the work.
- Particular challenges with identity issues (who am I without my work?), the need for meaning and purpose (what is my life for?), coming to terms with 'free' time (after a workaholic lifestyle), issues of status (does anyone know who I am?)
- The usual challenges of transition and re-entry (adjustment to 'home', financial worries, where to live, finding one's place in church, letting go of the past, healing of any woundedness, developing a new pattern of life)

5. What may help the process:

- Clear expectations and guidelines about retirement from the start
- Quality time to prepare for retirement and to think through the issues, say 2 years ahead
- Teaching throughout mission life on finding our identity and worth in Christ
- Co-operation with the local church during the re-entry period, opportunity for de-briefing (internally and externally), a retirement retreat, and a proper 'de-commissioning'
- The opportunity to stay part of the mission 'family' if they want to, and to continue to contribute in some way

## The Spirituality of ageing

Moving into retirement is one of the major transitions of life, and coincides with a sense that we are growing older. It requires new responses from us, and offers one of our greatest spiritual challenges. Here are some of the issues where spirituality, retirement and growing old overlap and coincide.

1. The need to know our true identity in Christ even more fully - who am I when I can no longer contribute, produce or achieve? Worth and value must be found in God.
2. Becoming the person I really am - freedom from roles and responsibilities, the need to please other people, the pressures of living in another culture. Becoming my 'true self in God'.
3. Becoming at home with my body as it grows old - loving myself in the inevitable changes.
4. Finding meaning for this stage of life (Why am I still here?) and purpose (What should I be doing?).
5. Learning acceptance, contentment and the value of simplicity.
6. Enjoying life and the new opportunities to be creative, for leisure, for relationships, to explore and learn. Time to invest in relationships with family and friends.
7. Becoming more contemplative - meditating on the past, processing my own history, living at a slower pace, being present to the moment (less width and more depth).
8. Generativity - passing on to a new generation, nurturing younger people; children and grandchildren; what is my legacy?
9. Radical dependency - learning to live with limitation, weakness and dependency.
10. Coming to terms with losses and grief, the battle with depression.
11. Maturity in marriage - moving from 'eros' to 'philia' and eventually to 'agape' love.
12. Developing a new spiritual rhythm or pathway - when eyesight fails and hearing goes, no longer mobile and so on. Dealing with doubts and regrets, failures and mistakes, even a sense of 'was it all worth it?'
13. Facing up to our own mortality, preparing for death (homecoming).

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