

Freedom to serve * Q's from the Pews
August 9, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning, we've got another really great, really relevant question – what does the Bible say about retirement? That's a great question. Admittedly, I can't speak from experience here but I'll do what I can.

I'll be honest – when I think about retirement, my *immediate* understanding of retirement comes from Freedom 55 ads – you know, a happy couple dressed in matching white and khakis running down a beach drinking mai tai's. Retirement is all party umbrellas and palm trees, isn't it? That's not a realistic view of retirement is it?

London Life is a little off the mark so let's look together to see what the Bible says about retirement.

And to be honest the Bible really doesn't say much about retirement.

Retirement is a fairly modern concept – this idea that you could stop working and live on savings or pension - that just didn't happen with any consistency before the 1800's and certainly not in biblical times, so the Bible just doesn't say much about retirement specifically.

But there is one place where it mentions retirement and that's in Numbers 8:24-26. Numbers 8:24-26 God is doing HR for the Tabernacle and He says –

24 "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting,
25 but at the age of fifty, they must retire (literally 'withdraw') from their regular service and work no longer.
26 They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites" (Num 8:24-26 NIV).

This is the one place in the Bible where it talks specifically about retirement and I think we can learn some lessons from it. Admittedly, this only applied to the Levites and it doesn't say anything about people from the other tribes of Israelites, but I think that we can certainly learn some things about retirement for ourselves.

First, the value of rest. God created us to work; He made Adam and Eve and put them in the garden to 'work it and keep it.' Work is not inherently bad. It is a healthy part of life. But an equally important part of life is rest. There is a time to work and a time to rest. And retirement is an important time for rest – to rest from the early morning, out the door, nine-to-five, stress of the work day experience – and just appreciate the blessings that God has given. That's why God insisted that the Levites withdraw from service at fifty years of age. God knew we needed the reminder to rest. Now I'm not saying that your career is work time and your retirement is rest time – God has established an ebb and flow rhythm of work and rest – but I do want to affirm that retirement is important. Because retirement enables rest.

And second, retirement accounts for the reality of aging. Let's be honest - eighty year bodies are different from sixty year bodies are different from forty year old bodies are different from twenty year old bodies and nobody expects us to be keeping the same hours and efficiency in our sixties as we did in

our thirties. Our bodies are capable of different things at different stages of life and retirement is one way of accounting for that reality. The Levites were like the Tabernacle jack of all trades – they'd set it up and take it down and carry it around, they'd help with the sacrifices, there was a lot of physical labour and by fifty, I'm sure they were ready to take a break from it all. God established retirement here to acknowledge the reality of aging.

So Numbers 8:24-26 gives us the sense that retirement is good – it is a time for rest and a way to deal with the reality of aging – but the question is – what are we going to do with that time? If you'll notice, the Levites didn't just go from serving in the Tabernacle to sitting on the beach – they were welcome to and I suspect encouraged to continue to serve in some way in Tabernacle.

You know, I got thinking – Zechariah was in the Temple serving when he found out that they'd have a son who was John the Baptist – and Luke tells us that he and Elizabeth were both 'well along in years' (Luke 1:7). He was 'working' past retirement age and so I think that not only is retirement for rest, retirement is a time for service. You've spent much of your life working to make money; now in retirement, your work can be simply for the sake of helping others.

I mean, Titus 2 talks about older men setting an example for younger men; older women building into the lives of younger ones.ⁱ 2 Timothy 2 and Psalm 78 both talk about passing the Gospel on from one generation to the next, grandparents to grandchildren and so on.ⁱⁱ And Psalm 92:14-15 say 14 [The righteous] will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, 15 proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him" (Psa 92:14-15 NIV).

Clearly, retirement is not just for running down the beach in billowing tunics; retirement involves bearing fruit – retirement involves service.

And actually, I would put it like this – Think of retirement not just as freedom from work; think of retirement as freedom to serve. Think of retirement not as freedom from work but as freedom TO serve.

You know, you've got this incredible opportunity in retirement to make a difference in your family, in your neighbourhood, in the world around you. You don't have the pressures of the work-a-day world, you don't have a fixed 9 to 5 schedule. Rest IS an important part of retirement, but rest TOO long and you're going to go cuckoo. Why not invest even a little of that time in serving others? Call someone and encourage them. Knit hats for newborns. Volunteer with Friendship House or the Food Bank. Build into your grandkids. Pray for other people and let them know that you are holding them up in prayer. Simple acts matter.

And I know that many of you are doing this. You're not spending retirement sitting on your butt doing nothing. You are looking for ways, appropriate to your age and circumstances, to bless others with the freedom of time that you have. And I'm thankful for that.

Think of retirement not as freedom from work, but as freedom to serve.

I want to close here with something that I got from the website 'gotquestions.org' – it's a site where people post questions and pastors respond. Their article on retirement was really helpful, so I'll give them the final word:

“The Christian never retires from Christ’s service; he only changes the address of his workplace. In summary, as one reaches “retirement age” (whatever that is) the vocation may change but one’s life work of serving the Lord does not change. Often it is these “senior saints” who, after a lifetime of walking with God, are able to convey the truths of God’s Word by relating how God has worked in their lives. The psalmist’s prayer should be our prayer as we age: “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come” (Psalm 71:18). <https://www.gotquestions.org/retirement-Christian.html>

ⁱ NIV Titus 2:1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

ⁱⁱ Psalm 78:4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

2 Timothy 2:2 - 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2Ti 2:2 NIV).