

# THE CHRISTIAN AND WORK

## WEEK 6: SHOULD I QUIT MY JOB? IS IT TIME TO RETIRE?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- The overall goal of this six-week class is to give a broad overview of how Christians are to view work with a Biblical worldview.
- Our schedule will look like this:
  - Week 1: What is a Biblical theology of work?
  - Week 2: What is a Biblical work ethic? How can I work for God's glory?
  - Week 3: How can I tell when work has become my identity and/or an idol?
  - Week 4: Are some jobs more spiritual than others?
  - Week 5: How do I balance work, church, family, life, etc.?
  - **Week 6: Should I quit my job / take a new job / retire?**

### INTRODUCTION

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- Whether it is quitting a job, finding a new job, or retiring, the principles of action are the same. Our focus should be to glorify God and seek how we can bless our neighbor.
- All of the principles that we have gone over up to this point are still applicable. Our desire should be to *work heartily unto the Lord*. As we will read, this should mark our whole life.
- There is too little material in Scripture to derive a comprehensive theology of retirement. But as we age, each of us can prepare for retirement with as much, or more, care as we have prepared for work. When young, we can respect and learn from more experienced colleagues. At every age, we can work toward retirement policies and practices that are fairer and more productive for both younger and older workers.<sup>1</sup>
- But as you and I face the prospects of growing old in America, we need to ask ourselves, "What should I be doing now, however old I am, to prepare for old age?" The fact is, you will be then what you are becoming now. If you are not becoming a person of faith now, you will not be a person of faith then. If you are a negative, grumpy person now, you will not be a positive, cheerful person then. If you aren't developing a walk with God now, you won't have one then.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/numbers-and-work/retirement-from-regular-service-numbers-82326>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-71-growing-old-god%E2%80%99s-way>

## WHEN IS IT TIME TO QUIT MY JOB?

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- This is not a question which can always be resolved with a black and white answer.
- The obvious, easy reasons are when an employer demands that you act immorally or sinfully. If they ask you to go against the truth of the Bible, perhaps that is time for you to look for another job.
  - This would mean that quitting would be the right thing to do. When it is impossible for you to do your job with integrity, it may be time to leave.
- The idea of staying at a job for decades, while comfortable, is not necessarily a Biblical concept. We want to have integrity and stability, but we also want to be faithful to where the Lord is leading us. God may be opening another door for work somewhere and if it fits your present needs, it may be good to take.
- **Things to keep in mind when thinking of leaving your job:**
  - The heart that you leave one job with you are going to take with you to the next.
    - If you are unsatisfied with the work you are doing now, it may not be an environmental fix that you need but a heart which is reoriented towards Christ.
    - You will take a stubborn heart with you wherever you go, it is best to fix it before you decide to move on.
  - Your job is not supposed to be “easy,” it has been affected by the fall.
    - The ease at which you do your work or how well you get along with your co-workers may have nothing to do with the job but the fact that we live in a fallen world.
    - The things going on around you should cause you to long for a perfect ruler in a perfect place doing perfect work.
  - Are you ready to start over at a new place?
    - No matter where you go, it will be starting over in some sense. Even in the same industry, there are going to be learning curves and new things to learn.
    - Thinking about things like seniority, earned time off, pay raises, etc.
  - Are you currently laboring for the Lord or dreaming of greener pastures?
    - If you are not following Biblical mandates where you are, what makes you think that you will at another place?
    - If you are not committed to following through and finishing something, you are going to take that same work ethic with you when you go to a new job.
  - Are you leaving over philosophical reasons or Biblical convictions?
    - We should not simply leave a job because we think we are miserable there. You may not agree with the management structure, you may not agree with how they give time off or rotate people on schedules.

- These could be areas that the Lord is desiring to grow you in: dying to self, idol of comfort, wanting things to always be your way, etc.
- The things that the Lord is doing is never only about you. God is working in a myriad of ways to accomplish His plans and purposes.

## WHAT IS BIBLICAL RETIREMENT?

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### The History of Retirement

- Back in 1889, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck invented the idea of retirement. “Those who are disabled from work by age and invalidity have a well-grounded claim to care from the state,” he said at the time. He wanted to address high youth unemployment by paying those 70 and older to leave the workforce, and other countries followed suit with retirement ages around 65 or 70.<sup>3</sup>
- The United States created Social Security in 1935 and added Medicare health benefits for the elderly in 1965. In the 1980s, many countries lowered the age at which people could retire and collect full benefits. This step was part of an effort to clear older workers out of the labor force to make way for the young.<sup>4</sup>
- I bring this up for one main reason, the concept of retirement from work is completely a cultural idea. Let me qualify that statement.
- Retirement is, to the Western mind, a time of rest and leisure that one has earned because they have worked their whole life and now they get to sail off into their golden years; never to work again.
  - When I speak of retirement, this is the concept that I have in mind.
- Sadly, our American culture does not esteem the elderly. We are a self-centered, utilitarian society. The younger generation often views the elderly as a financial burden and, if they require our care, as an interference in the pursuit of pleasure and success. This was most outrageously stated a few years ago by then-Colorado governor, Richard Lamm. In a discussion of spiraling health care costs, he said that terminally ill elderly people have “a duty to die and get out of the way.” Most would be more polite, but the underlying attitudes are there. Dr. Kevorkian is helping Governor Lamm’s wish come true, by assisting the terminally ill in suicide.<sup>5</sup>

### A Bible Verse About Retirement

- Most common among those who want to see retirement in the Bible go to **Numbers 8:24–26** “**This is what applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. *But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work***

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/04/why-retirement-is-a-flawed-concept>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/a-brief-history-of-retirement-its-a-modern-idea/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-71-growing-old-god%E2%80%99s-way>

**any more.** They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation, but they themselves shall do no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations.”

- We need to take this with some other passages in Scripture:
  - The age of the Levite for service was increased from the earlier 30 to 50 (Num 4:2) to limits of 25 to 50. A census of Levites thirty to fifty years of age was taken during David’s reign, and assignments were outlined for various groups (1 Chr 23:2–5). Yet later in David’s reign (1 Chr 23:24–27), during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:16–17), and in the early postexilic community, Levites twenty years of age and older were counted and enlisted for Temple service.<sup>6</sup>
  - Why the change in ages when they started service?
  - **Three variants evidence three different historical settings:** (1) an age thirty minimum was established for tabernacle transport and service (Num 4:1–49, such as the 38,000 counted for Temple service in 1 Chr 23:2–5), (2) age twenty-five for service in the Tent of Meeting, and (3) the younger age of twenty was after there was no longer a need for transporting the tabernacle.<sup>7</sup>
- We see that the ages changed regarding the need that was there. It is important to also read **Numbers 8** for what it really is.
  - **First, Moses is talking to the nation of Israel as a whole.** This command of service in the temple of God is not repeated anywhere else in the New Testament, or the Bible for that matter.
  - **Secondly, this was given to Israel but specifically to the Levites.** There is nothing in the text that would suggest this command was for all the workers in Israel and then the church to follow.
  - **Thirdly, this command was given at a specific time in history for a specific purpose.** We do not follow any of those laws today, we cannot just pick a random one from the Old Testament.
  - **Fourthly, when we compare this with Moses we see a very different story.** **Exodus 7:7** “Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.”
    - Moses was forty when we left Egypt to work as a shepherd. Then, forty years later at 80 God called him to lead Israel out of bondage. Then, 40 years later at 120 years old, **Deuteronomy 34:7** “Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.”
    - Even more interesting is that Moses was a Levite (**Exo. 2:1–2**), though not in the priestly sense that Numbers talks about.
- Our hermeneutics is of the utmost importance when we deal with our cultural norms. Regardless of what the culture deems to be appropriate (like retiring at 66–67 years old), we need to stick to what the Bible says.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers, vol. 3B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

- Can we derive any principles for today from the **Numbers 8** passage? I think we can.
  - The point is not that fifty is a universal retirement age, but that a time comes when an aging body performs with less effectiveness at work. The process varies highly among individuals and occupations.<sup>8</sup>
  - Reading back to Moses in Deuteronomy 34:7, it explicitly says that he had good eyesight and his vigor was not abated. Why was he still serving up to 120 years old? **Because he could.** He still had life in his body, so he used it to serve the Lord until he was called home.
    - We need to know what we can physically and mentally handle and then make sure that we are doing whatever that is.
  - Retirement, however, was not the end of the Levites' work. The purpose was not to remove productive workers from service, but to redirect their service in a more mature direction, given the conditions of their occupation. After retirement they could still “assist their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties” (**Num. 8:26**). Sometimes, some faculties—judgment, wisdom, and insight, perhaps—may actually improve with increasing age. By “assisting their brothers,” older Levites transitioned to different ways of serving their communities. Modern notions of retirement that consist of ceasing work and devoting time exclusively to leisure are not found in the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

## HOW SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN VIEW RETIREMENT?

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- The short answer...*like everything else that we have been talking about.*
- Like the Levites, we should not seek a total cessation of meaningful work in old age. We may want or need to relinquish our positions, but our abilities and wisdom are still valuable. We may continue to serve others in our occupations by leadership in trade associations, civic organizations, boards of directors, and licensing bodies. We may consult, train, teach, or coach. We may finally have the time to serve to our fullest in church, clubs, elective office, or service organizations. We may be able to invest more time with our families, or if it is too late for that, in the lives of other children and young people. Often our most valuable new service is coaching and encouraging (blessing) younger workers.<sup>10</sup>
- Even the secular world knows “Edmund Phelps was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2006 and in his mid-80s he is not slowing down. His few days in Madrid are spent giving university lectures, panel presentations and media interviews.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/numbers-and-work/retirement-from-regular-service-numbers-82326>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48882195>

- No matter what age we are, we never know how close we are to the finish line. It is not the number of years that is the issue. Jesus lived some thirty-three years on earth, but He lived well and finished strong.
- Our desire should be to be able to look back at our life and know that we were faithful with what the Lord had tasked us to do. We know that we are not perfect, God does not expect us to be perfect. He expects us to be faithful in completing the tasks that He has for us.
- Even in our retirement, God is going to graciously take care of us as we are laboring for Him. He is not going to forget about us and set us to the side.

## **Finishing Strong**

- The phrase “finishing strong” implies a start, middle, and end. Every life is a story, a narrative, threaded with choices. The choices made over a lifetime impact—perhaps even determine—if we finish strong.<sup>12</sup>
- **2 Timothy 4:5–8 “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”**
- There are four imperatives that Paul gives Timothy here regarding his work as the pastor of Ephesus.
- Be sober in all things...Endure hardship...Do the work of an evangelist...Fulfill your ministry...
- These were specifically given to Timothy, as a pastor, but the principles which we can take from these four commands are for every Christian.
- While each of these imperatives is important, Paul exhorts Timothy to *fulfil* his ministry.
  - “You have a ministry that God expects you to carry out to the full.”<sup>13</sup>
  - Your ministry does not end when the 9–5 work is over. That may be the time that you start to search out ways that you can serve the Lord with more diligence.
  - You know when you have fulfilled your ministry when you are physically or mentally unable to complete what is in front of you.
- Paul uses himself as an example and says *I have finished the course*.
  - This implies two very important things...there is a finish line and there is a course that we are to follow. There is a way that the Lord desires His people to go and in order to finish well, we must continue on that path until the Lord calls us home.
  - We should not be worried with other people’s courses and how the Lord is using them. We have something that is entrusted to us that we must complete.
- Paul’s motivation was not things of this life but what was coming.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/our-choices-matter>

<sup>13</sup> Jay E. Adams, *I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus, The Christian Counselor’s Commentary* (Cordova, TN: INS, 2020), 82.

- He says *in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day*. Paul was going full speed ahead, not because people were watching or because he had nothing else to do.
- He was working because he knew that ultimately it was the crown of righteousness, that great reward, which was awaiting him.
- Had he simply been laboring for the world's pleasures and leisure, he would have stopped his ministry, not finished the course and not had rewards awaiting him in heaven.

## HOW (WORLDLY) RETIREMENT HAS HURT THE CHURCH

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- Old age can be one of the most satisfying periods in a person's life. Sadly, retirement sidelines many people just at the moment when their gifts, resources, time, experience, networks, influence, and wisdom may be most beneficial. Some choose to pursue only leisure and entertainment or simply give up on life. Others find that age-related regulations and social marginalization prevent them from working as fully as they desire.
- Snowbirds:
  - These are the well-known people who stay in the "warm" areas of the country, consistently moving to where the weather is to their liking.
  - To be sure, some have to do this for health reasons. They simply cannot take the cold anymore but desire to be in two places.
  - This can hurt the church by not consistently being in one place and single-minded about body life ministry. It is hard to have meaningful relationships if you are only around a place for a few months.
- Leisure over committed work:
  - The one who retires to travel, to golf, to live by the beach...these are not goldy motives. There is nothing wrong with these activities in themselves, but if that is your goal of working, you are missing the mark.
  - There is no such thing as an earned break from work. The Bible commands us to work, as we have talked about. That is not to say that the work which you do may change, but you must still work.
- Staying with like minded people and not investing:
  - Older people are some of the greatest gifts to the church.
  - **Titus 2:1–8 "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."**

- If you decide to stay with people like you, not only is the church missing out on your wisdom and experience, but you are also unable to fulfil the Biblical commands to teach the younger generation.
- Our society has become far too dependent on government and other organizations to do the job of teaching and training the youth.
- We have become a “me centered” culture, even within the church. Discipleship is what makes the church prosper, grow and impact the world.
- How the church views “old people.”
  - We must stop looking at “old people” the same way the world does. They are an invaluable resource that the Lord has graciously placed among us to help us navigate life.
  - The world has sought ways to get rid of the elderly, we need to rejoice that we still have them.
  - Most retired people now have more time than they are used to. It is incumbent upon the church to have places they are able to serve so that they can be good stewards of their time.

## **FINISH WITH A PSALM BY AN OLD GUY...PSALM 71<sup>14</sup>**

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- God’s way for us to grow old is to develop a walk with Him now.
  - Verse 17 “O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.”
- Develop trust in the Lord.
  - Verse 3 “Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress.”
- Develop a habit of praise.
  - Verse 6 “By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You.”
- Have a habit of hope.
  - Verse 14 “But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more.”
- Have a lifestyle of ministry.
  - Verse 8 “My mouth is filled with Your praise and with Your glory all day long.”
  - Verse 18 “And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.”

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<sup>14</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-71-growing-old-god%E2%80%99s-way>