

September 27, 2020

Surprise! The Retirement Plan – that Isn't

Exodus 6:28-7:7

There comes a time when I can “retire” from church, right? (I’m not meaning specifically, me, Bruce, as pastor at First Baptist, Lethbridge – so some of you can stop rejoicing with much rejoicing now 😊). What I mean is, for those of us who have spent many years involved in the life of a church, there comes a time when we can just stop, right? There are lots of other people who can do what I’ve been doing. I’ve done my time. It’s time for someone else to take over. I want to take a break and just enjoy life, alright?

It’s a small thing, but an important thing ... how old is Moses in this chapter (7:7)? 80. How old is Aaron? 83. Do you know the word “retirement” doesn’t exist in the Bible – nothing even close to it. Surprise! It’s not there. It’s not an option. When it comes to (1) believing in Jesus, (2) living our faith consistently, (3) hearing God’s call on our lives, (4) finding opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others, and (5) actually taking up our “staff” and doing things for God and His Kingdom ... we never retire. We’re never too old.

There is no example of anyone in scripture who did their time, sat back, and did nothing more ...

However, notice God didn’t call 80-year old Moses to wheel in a wheelbarrow full of bricks and construct a wall. He didn’t call 83-year old Aaron to sprint the length of Pharaoh’s throne room to show off his “youthful vitality.” God gave Moses a staff/cane to throw down. He gave Aaron words to speak. When I’m an octogenarian I might even be able to handle that.

Whoever you are, wherever you are in life, whatever your limitations might be ... you still have a purpose. God can still use you in profound and wonderful ways.

For those of us who are younger, take advantage of some of the “more mature” people in your lives. God has given you some godly role models and mentors. They can help us with the challenges we face in our lives. They have been there. They have done that.

The good side of getting older

Let’s be honest – not one of us is getting younger. We’re all getting older. Whether we are seven, seventeen, or seventy, we are all getting older every day and every year. Nothing is going to stop that. So, given this is a reality of life, how are we going to handle it? How can we age in a way that honours God, that reflects our “Christian” faith?

We often lament the aging process. *“There’s nothing golden about the golden years.” “They should call them the ‘rusty years’ not the ‘golden years.’”* In particular, from a Christian perspective, is there any good side to getting older?

In our culture, we tend to equate aging with **losing** abilities rather than **gaining** abilities. In

general cultural terms, getting older is mostly – if not all – bad. We evaluate people based on their (young) age, physical health and strength. We idolize the young, strong, fit people ... and don't quite know what do with those of us who have lost a step or two and a hair or a few hundred ... This is a dramatic cultural shift from almost every other culture in history who respected – even venerated – age and wisdom. Many cultures, including our own First Nations, continue to respect age. But, in general, we don't.

When it comes to sports – like hockey or football, for instance – there is probably some merit in betting on the young, strong, fit crowd. But even the best sports team value wily veterans and the wise coach, too (some of the most successful NFL coaches are in their late 60's).

But when it comes to a lot of things in life, is youth the be all and end all? The curious thing is that when it comes to business, politics, health care, education – and even spiritual maturity – we tend to celebrate youth, physical power, appearance, and health, too. But are those really good measures? Is the young guy – with little life experience – really the best person to be the CEO? Or neurosurgeon? Or MP? Or team captain? Or pastor?

So much of our cultural evaluations of people are based on age, which may – or may not – be very useful.

When I was younger, yes, I was physically stronger and faster than now. But I knew a lot less. And I was much less wise. Of course, I didn't think so at the time. I was young. I was fit. I was strong. And, therefore, I knew it all; I was the smartest/wisest/most intelligent person I thought I knew; I was sure if only politicians/bosses/professors/teachers/pastors listened to me, everything would be wonderful!

As I have aged, things have changed. I cannot run as fast as I used to. I cannot pump as much iron as I once did. I cannot burn the midnight oil like I used to.

But I am more **knowledgeable**. By knowledge I mean, just knowing stuff. For instance, I know Scripture better, I know how to read Scripture better, I know the tools that can help study Scripture I never knew before (languages, commentaries, cultures, etc.). I know more about life, more about the world, more about people. My old simple – simplistic – idealistic answers don't work so well anymore. And I know, more and more, how little I still actually still do know. One of the lessons I continue to learn is the importance of life-long learning – I need to keep on learning, thinking, and growing. I will never "arrive."

I am **wiser**. By wisdom I mean ***knowing what to do with the knowledge I have***. I (hopefully) am better able to apply the biblical insights I've learned to the challenges and opportunities of life. Hopefully we've all realized the Bible doesn't give us specific instructions for each and every situation we face in life – like Covid-19. But we can continue to learn from wise mentors, experiences, and God's patient instruction, to figure out how to apply biblical knowledge to our new, changing circumstances.

By allowing God's Spirit to shape and teach me through the wisdom of Scripture and wise mentors, I (trust) my mind, heart, and soul are being shaped by God so I can handle the

situations in godly ways. And I am aware, more and more, that although I am wiser than I used to be, I still struggle to act as consistently, Christianly, as I ought. And so I need to be life-long “wise-ing” too – continuing to prayerfully ask God for the wisdom to face new challenges. Solomon writes, *“Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions ... Wise words are like deep waters; wisdom flows from the wise like a bubbling brook”* (Proverbs 18:2, 4).

Over the years I think I have become more **humble**. I don’t know it all anymore. I don’t judge other people as much as I used to. I don’t have all the answers. I find I’d much rather work with a team – with other people – than on my own to plan the future. I no longer see myself as the uniquely gifted, spectacularly brilliant visionary who, alone, knows best, anymore. I know my limits. And I know I need the collective insight of all sorts of people.

The good side of getting older is that as you age, you have valuable knowledge. You have wisdom. You have insights that you can share with and build into the people around you! Don’t sell yourself short – God doesn’t!

- All of us have some wisdom.
- All of us can be encouragers.
- All of us can be mentors.
- All of us can be cheerleaders for the people around us.
- And all of us can pray-ers for the people around us, too. As I have become older – and hopefully wiser – I am appreciating more and more the importance and power of prayer. We glibly say, “Prayer is the most powerful fore in tha universe.” But do we actually model that in our lives? Do we actually pray?

In Psalm 92:12-14, we read, *“The godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord’s own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.”* What is God calling you to be and do?

In it for the long haul

If you are reading through Exodus this month, you will know that Exodus 7:1-7 is just the beginning of a long, long journey. There will be confrontations with Pharaoh. There will be terrible plagues. There will be a harrowing journey to the Red Sea. There will be a nerve-racking crossing through the sea. There will be forty years wandering in the wilderness including two mountain climbs. This is not a stroll in the park for an aging pair of men.

Moses is not always happy about the situations he finds himself in. He should be having an easier time in his old age, not a more difficult time. He is blunt about his feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration, impatience, and disillusionment. He is learning to talk with God with complete honesty and transparency.

But despite the challenges, Moses sticks with it.

One of the things those of us who have been trying to walk with Jesus for some time are learning is endurance. Because you don't have to be a Christian too long – you don't have to be a human being too long – before you know that bad things happen – even to good people. But those who stick with it discover God's presence and hope in the midst of even the most difficult of times:

"Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith," Paul writes, "we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:1-5).

Our challenge is to keep at it, despite the difficulties. And to keep learning, growing, wise-ing, and being more and more humble, open to the wisdom and insights of those around us. To keep on praying (or to start praying). If we can do nothing else, we can pray. Never sell yourself short in this department. The younger, fitter, more active people in your world desperately need your prayers.

As we age, our challenges will change. Our abilities will change.

But our opportunities will change, too. As our physical abilities and activity levels change, we may find we actually have more time for what's really important in life: spending time with other people. And spending time, in prayer, with God.

And for those of you not there yet ...

And for those of you who are glad this sermon isn't for you – because you're not getting older ... Take advantage of the gift of older people in your life. They need you. They need your youth and enthusiasm. They need your knowledge about all those new gadgets and games. And they need to be needed.

And ... you need them. They might actually know something. You can grow in your knowledge. They might actually have some wisdom. You can grow in your wisdom. They might even be able to mentor and help you face your challenges. They can certainly pray for you. They can be your prayer warriors. Take advantage of them (in the best of ways 😊).