

Rethinking Retirement

FINISHING LIFE FOR THE GLORY OF CHRIST



JOHN PIPER

Rethinking Retirement

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RETHINKING RETIREMENT

enabled to willingly die for him, we are freed to love the lost as never before, and Christ is shown to be a great Treasure.

A Charge to Baby Boomers

I am sixty-two years old—just about the oldest baby boomer (January 11, 1946). Behind me come seventy-eight million boomers, ages forty-three to sixty-one. Over ten thousand turn sixty every day. If you read the research, we are a self-centered generation.

Likes: working from home, anti-aging supplements, climate control

Dislikes: wrinkles, Millennial sleeping habits, Social Security, insecurity

Hobbies: low-impact sports, uberparenting, wining and dining

Hangouts: farmer's markets, tailgate parties, backyards

Resources: \$2.1 trillion³

What will it mean to finish life to the glory of Christ as a baby boomer in America? It will mean

³Accessed 9-27-07 at <http://www.iconoculture.com/microsites/boomers/?gclid=COvX07OX5Y4CFSISQQod-x1QKQ>.

John Piper

a radical break with the mindset of our unbelieving peers. Especially a break with the typical dream of retirement. Ralph Winter is the founder of the U. S. Center for World Missions and, in his early eighties, is still traveling, speaking, and writing for the cause of Christ in world missions. He wrote an article titled “The Retirement Booby Trap” almost twenty-five years ago when he was about sixty. In it he said,

Most men don't die of old age, they die of retirement. I read somewhere that half the men retiring in the state of New York die within two years. Save your life and you'll lose it. Just like other drugs, other psychological addictions, retirement is a virulent disease, not a blessing. . . .

Where in the Bible do they see [retirement]? Did Moses retire? Did Paul retire? Peter? John? Do military officers retire in the middle of a war?”⁴

Millions of Christian men and women are finishing their formal careers in their fifties and sixties,

⁴Ralph Winter, “The Retirement Booby Trap,” *Mission Frontiers* 7 (July 1985): 25.

and for most of them there will be a good twenty years before their physical and mental powers fail. What will it mean to live those final years for the glory of Christ? How will we live them in such a way as to show that Christ is our highest Treasure?

The Perseverance of Charles Simeon

When I got prostate cancer and had surgery at age sixty, I recalled the experience of Charles Simeon and prayed that his outcome would be true for me.

Simeon was the pastor of Trinity Church, Cambridge, two hundred years ago. He learned a very painful lesson about God's attitude toward his "retirement." In 1807, after twenty-five years of ministry at Trinity Church, his health broke when he was forty-seven. He became very weak and had to take an extended leave from his labor. Handley Moule recounts the fascinating story of what God was doing in Simeon's life.

The broken condition lasted with variations for thirteen years, till he was just sixty, and then it passed away quite suddenly and

John Piper

without any evident physical cause. He was on his last visit to Scotland . . . in 1819, and found himself, to his great surprise, just as he crossed the border, “almost as perceptibly renewed in strength as the woman was after she had touched the hem of our Lord’s garment.”

He says that he had been promising himself, before he began to break down, a very active life up to sixty, and then a Sabbath evening [retirement!]; and that now he seemed to hear his Master saying: “I laid you aside, because you entertained with satisfaction the thought of resting from your labour; but now you have arrived at the very period when you had promised yourself that satisfaction, and have determined instead to spend your strength for me to the latest hour of your life, I have doubled, trebled, quadrupled your strength, that you may execute your desire on a more extended plan.”⁵

How many Christians set their sights on a “Sabbath evening” of life—resting, playing, traveling, etc.—the world’s substitute for heaven since

⁵Handley C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1948, orig. 1892), 125.

RETHINKING RETIREMENT

the world does not believe that there will be a heaven beyond the grave. The mindset of our peers is that we must reward ourselves now in this life for the long years of our labor. Eternal rest and joy after death is an irrelevant consideration. When you don't believe in heaven to come and you are not content in the glory of Christ now, you will seek the kind of retirement that the world seeks. But what a strange reward for a Christian to set his sights on! Twenty years of leisure (!) while living in the midst of the Last Days of infinite consequence for millions of people who need Christ. What a tragic way to finish the last mile before entering the presence of the King who finished his last mile so differently!

The Perseverance of J. Oswald Sanders

When I heard J. Oswald Sanders at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School chapel speaking at the age of eighty-nine say that he had written a book a year for Christ since he was seventy, everything in me said, "O God, don't let me waste my final years! Don't let me buy the American dream of retirement—month after month of leisure and play and hobbies and putzing around in the garage

Retirement. They say it's your reward for all those years of labor: "Trade in your time card! Sit back and enjoy! Golf-course comforts and beachfront leisure await!" But sexagenarian John Piper counters with a plea that he hopes all fellow baby boomers will echo: "Lord, spare me this curse!"

With millions of Christians formally retiring with a good twenty years ahead of them, what will it mean to live those final years for the glory of Christ? "How will we live them in such a way as to show," asks Piper, "that Christ is our highest Treasure?"

Rather than buying into the dulling mind-set of the American dream, take up God's dream for your golden years instead. Let *Rethinking Retirement* show you the way to growing old with godly zeal.

JOHN PIPER is pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. His many books include *What Jesus Demands from the World*, *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*, and *Don't Waste Your Life*.

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