

Running the final lap, Keswick Convention 2023

Session 1. Changing the pace: facing retirement

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

1. We are each on a race which has been individually **marked out for us**.
2. We need **perseverance**. It’s a marathon, not a sprint, and there’s likely to be struggle, suffering and difficulties ahead.
3. We are not alone. There is **a great cloud of witnesses** cheering us on - both in heaven but also here on earth. It’s a race that all members of the Christian family are actively engaged in.
4. We need to **fix our eyes on Jesus** – especially during the phases of the race that are particularly challenging and difficult.
5. Ultimately the race is all about **joy**. There is the joy that is to come after the finishing line, but also there is inexpressible joy to discover in the race (1 Peter 1:6-9). There is joy in accomplishing and fulfilling each stage with God’s help.

Preparing for and transitioning into retirement.

We are in the midst of dramatic changes in working practices, and startling improvements in health and life expectancy. Of babies born this year in the UK, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 6 boys are expected to live beyond 100 years. Many people today who are 'retiring' in the late 50s and early 60s will have 20-30+ years of healthy productive life ahead of them. This dramatic extension of healthy life is completely new in the history of humankind. So a fundamental question is "what are all these years for?"

In other words, within a Biblical Christian understanding of life and the world, '**What are old people for?**' and especially 'What are old people for, within the Christian community?'

Finding our deepest joy

Although we all have duties and responsibilities which we must fulfil – life has its ‘musts’, ‘shoulds’, and ‘oughts’ - these duties and responsibilities are often draining and tiring. They sap our energy. So in the second half of life, as our energy levels drop, we need to look especially to those activities, concerns and forms of service that thrill our hearts, because it is these which will *energise* and *motivate* us. So we need to look for those moments in our life when our heart sang. “Oh this is what I’m made for, this is my deepest joy.”

This is what the passage from Hebrews tells us about Jesus. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. He was motivated by the joy of resurrection, of winning his Bride, of inaugurating a new creation.

“The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. ... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet”. Frederick Buechner

It seems that for many of us, our unique calling from God is the point of intersection between our hearts deep gladness and the world's deep need.

It is the deep gladness that we experience when we find God's calling which energises and renews us – the God “who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.” (Psalm 103:

4. What are old people for?

Aspects of our calling frequently change as we progress along life's stages. So we need to reflect on our particular gifts, callings, resources and responsibilities, at this particular stage of the race.

Here are some suggestions (in no particular order):

- **Prayerfulness**, especially for the younger generations
- **A listening ear and increased availability for others**
- **Investing in deep intergenerational friendships / investing in the next generation**
- **Offering life wisdom in a non-judgemental way** - including our experiences of going through the deep waters of suffering, failure and bereavement.
- **Sharing our faith and hope in Christ with others**
- **Expressing gratitude and thankfulness** - especially for the smaller and frequently ignored blessings of creation, family and human friendship.
- **Providing positive models of 'letting go' graciously**
- **Hopefulness** - constantly pointing to the resurrection and new creation
- **Leaving behind a legacy of wisdom and a testimony to God's character and faithfulness over a long life.**

“A long life is a gift not a curse. It is full of possibilities and the gift is the gift of time”. Ian Knox

Some resources

The Final Lap: Navigating the transitions of later life. John Wyatt, 10ofthose

Finishing well: A God's eye view of ageing. Ian Knox, SPCK

The Gift of Years: Growing old gracefully. Joan Chittister, Bluebridge

Pioneering the third age. Rob Merchant, CARE

Transforming friendship: Investing in the Next Generation - Lessons from John Stott and others Kindle Edition. John Wyatt, IVP (published November 2023)

Retiring Well Course. Helen Calder <https://www.helensheadlines.net/transitions-retirement-course>

Faith in Later Life: resource hub. <https://faithinlaterlife.org/resource-hub/>

More resources at johnwyatt.com
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