Excerpt - Stepping Aside, Moving Ahead– Steve Harper

9781501810480

**It’s in the Bible**

Dear Chris,

I am not surprised to learn that some have responded to your planning to retire by saying that the Bible doesn’t teach it. Thank- fully, most you talked with responded lightheartedly, but even un- derneath their touch of humor there may at least be confusion about where retirement fits into the Christian journey. Let me use this let- ter to tell you what I think.

I must begin by agreeing with your critics, up to a point. If they take retirement to mean a withdrawal from vital living and adopting a kind of passive life, then I think they are correct. God never calls us to become disengaged, and retirement, as I am going to write about it, is not a call to “hang it up” and coast through the remaining years of your life. What I will be pointing to in this series of letters is an ongoing journey of significance and purpose—a journey lived under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, just as all your previ- ous years have been. Retirement is not the cessation of activity, but only a change in it.

But having said that, I must disagree with your critics. I have found that some folks use the “it’s not biblical” response as a license to keep on going through a series of reinventions of themselves. They may have quit one job, but they quickly find another one to give them a sense of significance. Simply put, they do not know how to let go. They falsely equate their role with their life and run the risk of defining it in terms of activism, and even worse, by status. This is a matter that will require further attention in our correspondence, but I mention it now because you may have fallen prey to some clergy who think that the abandonment of their professional role is tanta- mount to the loss of their personhood. This is a serious error.

Instead, I want you to consider some things about retirement that are in the Bible. First, the Bible does teach specifically about re- tirement, and it does so with respect to religious leaders. In Numbers

8:25-26, the Levites are told that at age fifty, they are to retire from their service. They are no longer to perform their previous duties. Doubtless, this prescription was related to the fact that these people were considered to be “old” in that era. In that context, the verses make it clear that these leaders were to do two things: (1) move aside so that younger people could perform the duties, and (2) support those younger persons as they did so.

The longer I ponder these two verses, the more convinced I am that they are a deep well of wisdom. For one thing, they acknowledge the aging process—something those who resist retirement often are failing to do. Second, they teach that we have our particular genera- tion of service, and when it is passed, we should get out of the way so that younger people can have theirs. Not to do this is to create a “clog” in the pipeline of servanthood that delays younger people from having their day. Finally, these verses make clear that we do not cease serving, but rather we serve in a new way—especially through our becoming supporters of those who have moved into their time of leadership.

But that is not all the Bible reveals about retirement. We gain in- sight from the patriarchs and matriarchs. These men and women do not continue to do what they have always done. Rather, they begin to do new things. In the Old Testament, for example, we see older men sitting by the gate, making themselves available for conversation and counsel. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote to older men and women, exhorting them to fulfill the important ministries of setting a godly example and mentoring younger men and women (Titus 2:2-5). Paul took his own advice by passing the torch of leader- ship to Timothy and to Titus, understanding that he had served his generation and was now to become an encourager to his two young friends who were now called to be ministers.

So, far from not teaching about retirement, I believe the Bible has a lot to say about it. It challenges any who believe they should never retire. It constructs an active view of retirement. Most of all, it offers us a farther journey into abundant living. The God of life does not have a moment when we leave life behind. But God does have a phase of life when we live differently than we have in the past. God opens the door to another room of life. Don’t let your detractors talk

you out of it.

*Blessings!*

*Steve*