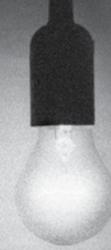


AGE-RELATED RETIREMENT



GREG PARSONS
/ GLOBAL DIRECTOR,
U.S. CENTER FOR
WORLD MISSION

So many things from our cultural background color our perspective, which makes it difficult to see where we might be wrong. Compulsory retirement at a set age is one. I'm all for having people change roles once their capacity is

diminished. I'm all for younger leaders having high-level engagement in any organization.

But I see no clear biblical teaching to argue for what many ministries do when someone reaches 62 or 65, or even 70. In fact, I would suggest that if the Bible says anything, it would tend to illustrate quite the opposite. By way of negative illustration from the OT, it was often (not always) when a much younger king was ruling Israel that the situation deteriorated for Israel—especially when they did not listen to their elders. In the NT and OT, elders are to be honored and respected. Elders in the church are “to lead.”

Here are two examples of policies that lack wisdom.

Several years ago, I met a judge who served the State of California court system. The governor had appointed him back in the 1960s and when I met him, he was almost 80 years old and still serving. While the legal system in California

desperately needed (and needs) a wise experienced judge, when he turned (about) 70 he was told he could keep serving, but would have to take a 50% pay cut. He continued and I always enjoyed hearing him tell about some of the significant cases over which he presided. I once read about a very public case on the front page of the *LA Times* where he was quoted. I was impressed that a younger, less experienced and respected judge could not have done what he did in that case. When I talked with him, I sensed that he felt he had no time to mess around! Age does not need to bring apathy, it can foster urgency.

Just a week ago at church, I was talking to an older “retired” missionary. He is still teaching part time—which he's done full-time for the last 30 years—after years of serving overseas. He is also continuing to work on technical projects and publishing in his areas of education and strength—often spending months in Asia. His brother is also a missionary. He worked on campuses for many years. At a certain age, he was told that he would have to retire. At the time, he also had a very effective men's ministry/study at his church. Students and men and other leaders looked to him for wisdom.

So he continues to mentor and teach, traveling around the world with various groups doing training. He is “free” to still do ministry and it sounded like he is seeing more and more impact as a result of his

faithfulness, experience and wisdom. We probably all know of people who have held on to control for too long. Rather than set a year for required “retirement” from a particular role—even top leadership roles—I suggest we have systems in place to effectively evaluate people at various life stages. This could be a great step help to leaders who need to process through their own growth and focus on where God has expressly gifted them for their next years. There are a number of tools to help ministries do this. When the time is right to pass the top role to another, processing it beforehand will help leaders see that continuing to run the day-to-day operations of their ministry (or business) may no longer be where God wants to use them. I realize that sometimes that is not easy to accept.

Our culture of dishonoring those who are older is reflected in much of our marketing and media culture. We've bought into it, along with the materialism it promotes. I encourage you to resist.

Do you have an older person who speaks into your life? Is there someone you have sought for wisdom on a regular basis? If not, seek one or two, perhaps with strengths in different areas you feel would help you.

Even as I grow wiser (I hope) at this stage of my own life, I increasingly feel the need for the wisdom of someone older who has walked this way before. 