CHANGING GEARS

Moses died at 120 years old, still working—leading the Israelites. In fact, he didn’t even start the job until he was 80! Abraham’s wife, Sarah, lived until she was 127 years old. What is noteworthy though, is how old she was when she had that all-important baby named Isaac, she was 90! Noah lived to the ripe old age of 950 years, yet it wasn’t until he was 600 that he stepped into the ark! The apostle John penned the book of Revelation in his 90’s only a few short years before his death of old age!

What is common to these few examples is uncommon in our American culture. Retirement is a wonderful invention that allows us to stop working when we get older. In some careers it may start as soon as our early 50’s. Projects around the house, golfing, traveling, spending time with the grandkids, fishing and other leisurely hobbies take over our priorities.

There is nothing inherently wrong with these activities; however, we must recognize the fact that there is no call in scripture for retiring from the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20). Nothing is mentioned of being able to stop doing Jesus’ command at retirement age! Rather, how we do this work of evangelizing, discipling and ministering to others may change as we get a little more advanced in years.

People born between the years of 1946 and 1964, known as the Baby Boomers, are the largest of any current generation numbering approximately 84 million people. This wonderful generation started turning 65 last year, many of which have already retired and joined the Traditionalists. The Traditionalists are those born from 1922-1945. Together these folks from the two generations account for approximately 45% of the American population.¹ By 2030 the 65+ year olds will be a group twice as large as it was in 2000.² I am one of these 84 million people and I would like to challenge all of the others in this huge, vast, enormous group of Americans.

This aging of Americans poses three different challenges. Ed Lewis, the director of CE National, says “Many of our seniors become isolated as they get older. Their children have moved away, many family members have passed on and their support is eroding.” James 1:27 tells us that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the

¹ 2010 US Census.
world.” James urges all of us to do what the Bible tells us not just to listen to it. I challenge us to see this verse as a theme for the later working and retirement years of our lives. God gives two directives in this verse, the first of which is to look after those in distress, which includes the poor as well (Acts 10:31), and to “keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

This is not just simply trying to do good things. James speaks of a heart changing faith where our priority is not the things of this world because we protect ourselves from the pollution here. This faith then plays out in a personal ministry that is many faceted, here in James 1:27 it is suggested to look after those in distress. Matthew 28:19-20 speaks of evangelism and discipleship. The three challenges that are presented with this aging group of Americans are, first of all, some of us within the group need the help of others. Secondly, there are such a large number of people to do the helping. Lastly, there are a large group of people in our own age group that we can communicate with, as well as others, which need Christ! Barna Research, in a study released in 2006, revealed that less than half of American adults claim to be born-again according to a thorough and accurate definition of the term. So we have work to do and being retired allows more time for this great work that honors our Savior!

There are many different ways to accomplish our work and they are only limited by our imaginations. Following are several suggestions that you can do as an individual or as a group. Don’t be hesitant about gathering others to do group projects, some things work best that way.

1. Use your hobby to mentor or disciple others. Take someone golfing with you, young or old, and teach them golf or about life. Mentor them in how to stay happily married for 30, 40 or 50 years. Share how God has built your faith over the years. Whatever your hobby is use it as an evangelism and/or discipleship tool. We have to be intentional about our personal ministries.

2. Many churches have people that hold services in a senior center. This is good but stops short of really ministering to individuals. Go a step further and adopt specific people. Take them to the doctor, help them get their groceries and even bring them to your house for an evening of dinner, visiting and have them teach you a game.

3. Adopt a restaurant in your area that seniors frequent. Plant flowers, clean up the grounds and build relationships with the employees and regular customers. This will lead to evangelistic opportunities and serving others if you keep your eyes open to people.

4. Either as an individual or group-adopt a school. North Baptist Church of Flint, MI has done this with great effectiveness. Through the efforts of many mentors there have been several elementary age children come to know Christ as their Savior and even a few of the parents. Pastor Todd Meece shares that the Guidance Counselor of an elementary school near their church wanted to institute a program to help what they considered high risk children. These kids are experiencing trouble with one or many of their subjects

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largely due to circumstances such as a dad in jail, single parenthood and so forth. The purpose is to connect these kids with a “mentor” from church that would spend 30-60 minutes a week with the kids, one-on-one, at the school. The teacher appreciated the help as the mentors would tutor for some of their time then play a game or talk with the student. Grades improved, and “if the mentor does a good job the kids want to come to church” said Pastor Meece. The options with the kids are open to the mentor’s imagination. Some of the boys, with their male mentor, made rockets and set them off on one of the men’s farm. One of the ladies took her girl shopping and got the girl some new clothes. The children would be invited to birthday parties, Thanksgiving and Christmas get-togethers. The church organized an end of the school year ice cream party for all the mentors and kids and their parents. In many cases the child’s parents got involved with the mentors as well. The biggest share of the mentors are age 50 and above.

5. Many counties or cities have a publication for seniors. It may be a newspaper or a newsletter. Utilize this to see what is happening in your area to get involved with people that need God.

6. Individually or as a group you could start a transportation ministry for a specific group that you would like to target. The target could be shut-ins, helping working single moms transport their kids to ball games, disabled people, whatever your heart desires.

7. 6-PACKS. John Coulombe, director of Senior Adult Ministries at First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, CA, shares that is it critical for their ministry to hold training on how to prepare for retirement. The importance of doing ministry through our entire life is discussed and fostered. One of the many things they do is the 6-Pack program. This consists of 6 people meeting once a month for 6 months and studying 6 chapters of the Bible-1 and 2 Timothy. The six individuals are of different generation and alternate leading the discussion each month. A mentoring, training and bonding experience this has proven to be.

8. Respite Care Ministry. A care giver needs a break too! Organizing fill-ins to give the care at different times so the full time care giver of an elderly or disabled person can have a break is a wonderful welcome for the exhausted care giver.

9. Organizing an adult reading/writing program for those that speak English as a second language or one of the many inmates that need help with reading and writing is a terrific ministry.

There are many ideas in which to become involved and an excellent resource for ways to accomplish them, as well as more ideas, is “His Heart Our Hands”. This is a program put together by the North American Mission Board of Southern Baptist Convention (1-800-447-8032).

In conclusion, if you feel the Lord convicting you to do more for Him this is a good sign. Seek Him in prayer and move forward to honoring Christ with your actions. Each of us needs to
be “On Mission” mentoring and helping others as Christ has blessed each of us with gifts and experiences. We must be intentional about affecting our world for Christ!

Who are you mentoring?

Who are you praying for?

What are you studying?

Who are you sharing the gospel with?

By Rod Peebles, a Grace Seminary intern working at CE National