

Retirement: Blessing or Curse

When you think of retirement what pictures come to mind? Do you imagine yourself as an old, weak, frail person? Do you see someone in bed who cannot help him or herself? Is retirement positive or negative for you? Which one of these statements best reflects your expectations about retirement?

"I cannot wait to stop doing this stupid job."

"I am sick and tired of working."

"I need a rest."

"I need to get away from my family."

"I want to get off this island."

"I am tired of working for people. I want to do my own thing."

"I can't wait to do something different."

"I want to pursue my dream career."

"I want to spend more time with my family."

"I want to spend more time with my partner/spouse."

"I want to enjoy more sex in my old age."

Retirement should be understood as a transition to a new kind of living. It should not be equated with cessation of work or a lethargic lifestyle. I know what the reality is for many, but it does not have to be that way. For many, retirement is having no job, no money, no vacations, plenty of troubles, lots of knee joint pains, baby-sitting grandchildren and looking in the obits to see if you are dead. Do you realize that if you are thinking of retirement as a time to cease work, there is a greater risk that you will die prematurely?

Research tells us that common issues in late life are retirement, divorce, widowhood, misuse of prescription drugs, suicide, and neglect. Why is this? It is because people did not plan for retirement or have a misconception of senior years? For those who think of retirement as something positive and more as a transition to something different, they see retirement as doing what they want to do, allowing their creative juices to really flow freely, really fulfilling their dreams, going places they only dreamed about now, making more money than they have ever made, spending lots of time with family and friends, having lots of sex without the possibility of pregnancy.

One expert says: "Adjusting to retirement comes naturally to some people, while others find it more difficult. A person's health, mobility, financial resources, social ties, and the reason a person retires, all effect how a person handles retirement. Many retirees devote their time to volunteering in their communities: maybe in their grandchild's classroom at school, or by adopting a foster grandchild in the community." Kenneth C. W. Kammeyer in his book, "Marriage and Family," says: "Retirement is also thought to be associated with a number of negative outcomes, for both individuals and married couples. On the negative side it is often said that retirement is a time when people lose their interest in life, have lowered morale and depression, and even experience declines in physical health. Post-retirement husbands and wives are sometimes believed to be together too much, getting on each other's nerve and creating marital strife."

This brings me to the point of relationships or family life and retirement. As stated early in this article that if one sees retirement as a time to cease all labor, that person will die sooner than others who continue to be active. It is also compounded if one does not have healthy family relationships. These people will die even sooner after they retire.

Research indicates that persons who are living in unhealthy relationships at the time of retirement and/or during retirement will have a greater risk of dying prematurely, developing life threatening illnesses, developing psychological disorders, experiencing loneliness, losing faith in God. American Society of Aging states: "While relationships with friends, neighbors, and former coworkers are also important for retirees, family is the social institution that is the basis of our social support and exerts a lifelong hold and influence on us. . . Imperfect though the family may be, it is where most people turn for comfort and sustenance. Family ties can provide a rich source of involvement for retirees and can be a valuable source of support for them in the years ahead."

Retirement can negatively impact marriage. Psychologist Dr. Willard Harley says: "Retirement, as you probably know, often has a sudden and stressful impact on marriage. Many retired couples spend their remaining years together miserably because they cannot adjust to it. I'm not sure that we're supposed to retire. Throughout recorded history, people worked until they died or were physically or mentally incapacitated. In fact, the older people in society (elders) tended to rise to positions of authority, using their experience to direct and train younger people. . . After retirement you find yourself face-to-face with someone you haven't gotten along with for years. You can blame it on retirement, but the truth is, you have never learned to accommodate each other, and you are now forced to do something that should have been done from the day you were married: Create a lifestyle that takes each other's feelings into account."

If you want to have a happy, healthy retirement, start creating healthy relationships now. Human beings were not designed to "retire." We were made to work. We were made to love and be loved. We were made to interact with one another in meaningful relationships.

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