

licc.

REPURPOSE



Discover fresh purpose in retirement

PARTICIPANT'S
WORKBOOK

WELCOME

The word ‘retirement’ is OK, but it’s not the best. It focuses on the act of laying something down, but perhaps signals that it’s the beginning of a downward slope – that we’ve served our usefulness and now it’s time to eke out whatever pleasure we can from life while the younger ones get on with the business of doing the important stuff. That can’t be right, can it?

So while this resource will use the word retirement (because that’s the widely accepted word for this season of life), we’ve called it RePurpose. Because retirement is not just a time to minimise pain and maximise pleasure – it’s a season within which we can grow and discover more of God’s purposes for us.

This course is based on a few assumptions.

The first is that whatever age or stage of life we’re at, God always has good plans for us. Plans to be with us, plans to bless us, plans to grow us, and plans to work through us – for the good of others and the furthering of his kingdom. And if that’s true, we can assume our later years are significant years. We may retire from paid employment, but we do not retire from following and working with Jesus.

Think about so many of the significant characters in Scripture: many of them were old. Some of them did really significant stuff in their younger years, and continued to bear fruit into old age (think Daniel and John). While others in the Bible only get introduced at the point where they are already in their ‘twilight years’ (think Abraham and Sarah, Elizabeth and Zechariah). Some of the most significant things that happen in Scripture happen with older people playing a key role (for instance, the beginning of the Jewish nation, the exodus from Egypt, and the arrival of Jesus, to name just a few). So, along with the Rend Collective song, we can proclaim: ‘You’re not finished with me yet!’

The second assumption is that retirement will look very different for different people. This course doesn’t make assumptions about how people are feeling, what they want to do, or what they’re able to do. Our experience of retirement will be shaped by a whole range of factors: our physical health, mental health, finances, family situation, relationships, commitments, housing, personality, interests, past career, skills and abilities, church community, and so on. We’re all different, but whatever our situations, God has good plans and purposes for us.

And then the third assumption is that the whole of life matters. At LICC, we talk about ‘whole-life discipleship’. Historically, some Christians have drifted into the habit of believing some aspects of life matter to God (such as praying, attending church services, and running food banks), while other aspects of life fall outside his particular concern (such as cricket, gardening, and babysitting). But we maintain that if the Lord made it all (Colossians 1:16), and has died to ‘reconcile to himself all things’ through the cross (Colossians 1:20), then everything we do is significant to him. We can, and indeed should, do everything we do ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Colossians 3:17).

As you work through these sessions, may you hear the Lord’s affirmation. And as you reflect and discuss, together and alone, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).



Joe Warton

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MAKING THE MOST OF THIS RESOURCE

Find the right group. It may well be that your small group or some small groups in your church already consist entirely of people who are retired or close to retirement. This resource will be ideal for those groups. However, you or the retirees in your church might be part of a mixed-age group, or not part of a group at all. In that instance, it would be worth establishing a time-limited group of retirees to work through this resource together. It could also be used by a few friends, or by a group of individuals from a range of churches.

The questions are phrased in a way that assumes participants have retired, but it's possible you're doing this course as you approach retirement. If so, answer the questions as best you can and think about what your situation might be in the future.

Make sure everyone has a copy of this guide. Through the research we have done with many small groups around the country, we've found that discussion always works better when everybody in the group has a copy of the guide in front of them, rather than just the leader.

Get everyone involved. It's really good to get group members involved by asking them to read sections of the guide out loud, do Bible readings, and so on. Many groups find they experience a greater sense of ownership and participation when different people in the group take responsibility for leading sessions.

Couples can do the course together. For couples in the group, it might be a good idea to attend the sessions together. Alternatively, if that's not practical or advisable, it's a good idea for them to have intentional conversations about the main learning points and the implications for their lives.

And remember, this discussion guide is your servant, not your master. If you think there are some questions that aren't going to work in your group, or that there are ways you can phrase things better, go for it.

Rear-View

IN MY RETIREMENT, WHAT DO I NOTICE ABOUT THE PAST?



Session aim: *To reflect on your life up until now, recognising that God has been faithful throughout your life, and therefore you can trust him in this season.*

GETTING GOING

Just as a year consists of different seasons, so do our lives. Each season has its own beauty, its own purpose, its own opportunities, and of course, its own challenges. As we walk through life with God, in every season he wants to bless us, draw us closer to himself, help us become more like Jesus, and involve us in his great mission in the world.

As we move into a new season, and once we find ourselves in retirement, we don't enter with a blank slate. Whether our retirement is a gradual or a sudden process, it doesn't magically turn us into different people. We are still us. Into our retirement years we bring ourselves: our experiences and memories, our ideas and perceptions, our good habits and bad, our successes and our scars, our faith and our doubt.

In the sessions that follow, we will focus our attention on the present and the future. But in this first session, we turn our gaze to the past. This session is all about remembering. Remembering where we've been and remembering who's been with us.



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- **As you look back over the various seasons of your life, which did you enjoy the most and why?**

MEET KATIE AND JOHN

Katie and John are in their early 70s, and have been retired for several years now. John spent the bulk of his working life as a project manager (planning projects and managing teams), and as a facilities manager (looking after buildings). Katie spent many years focusing her energy on raising their four children, tutoring her son (who has dyslexia), and supporting other children who had been excluded from mainstream education. For a long time, she volunteered with a pregnancy crisis centre – supporting potential mothers-to-be in one of the most emotionally volatile periods of their lives. And through all of this, to the present day, they have been heavily involved in their local church, including leadership team responsibilities, helping to oversee building projects, and hosting a home group.

When John talks about his former life, it's clear that he quite enjoyed the work he did, and he particularly misses the camaraderie that came from what we might call 'relationships with a purpose'. He still connects with people through his accordion club, camera club, and volunteering teaching disabled people to sail. But it's not quite the same as day-in, day-out work alongside others. He's grateful to God for guiding him in his career, and for providing him with meaningful work that enabled him to make a difference and to provide for his family. But one thing he definitely doesn't miss is having to get up before 6am every morning to work an exhaustingly long day!

When Katie looks back on life, what particularly stands out for her is a young girl who was really struggling at school. Katie was helping her work towards obtaining a GCSE in childcare, but then the girl got pregnant, and massively fell behind with her work. This girl was ready to give up. But Katie was determined to help her finish the course and gain the qualification, and to help this young girl become the best mother she could be. Katie and she worked incredibly hard, and amazingly, the girl obtained her qualification.



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- **And now to you. Now that you've retired, what do you miss? And what don't you miss?**
- **Thinking outside of church-based activities, as you look back over the course of your life, is there something you were involved in that gives you particular satisfaction?**

TURNING TO THE BIBLE

Remembering is a key biblical theme. Perhaps it could be argued that the biggest problem God's people have faced throughout history is forgetfulness. Time and again, when God's people failed to walk faithfully with him, he rebuked them for their forgetfulness.

Remembering who God is, what he's done, and who he calls us to be, matters. That's why, in their better moments, God's people in the Old Testament sought to provide themselves with memory aids. If God did something amazing in a particular place, they would name that place in a way that would help them remember. Or they would name their children after promises God had made to them, or things about God's character they cherished. Or they would build altars that they and later generations would see for years to come. They would write songs and poems about God's character and deeds. They would pray prayers and make communal declarations based on his mighty and merciful acts.

In today's passage, we turn to a section of the New Testament, where the apostle Paul provides us with an excellent example of remembering well.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–11

- From reading the passage, what kind of experience does it sound like Paul and his co-workers went through?
- What did God do for Paul and his co-workers?
- What impact did this whole experience have on Paul?
- What impact do you think this whole experience had on Paul when he encountered new situations after this one?
- Why do you think he takes the time to share this experience with the Corinthians?

Having thought about what happened back then, we can now reflect on our own lives.

- Can you think of a particular time when you've experienced God's help and faithfulness, whether in good times or bad?
- How might recognising what God has done for you in the past help you to keep trusting and serving him in this season?

Reflecting on his experience of despair and deliverance, Paul writes, 'this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead'. In our lives, we can find ourselves over-relying on ourselves: our skills, our reputations, our finances, our health, our looks, our connections.

- Can you think of one specific way you have been 'relying on yourself'? What would it mean for you to 'not rely on yourself but on God'?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Have someone in the group read out 2 Corinthians 1:3–11 slowly.

Take some time to give thanks to God for the lives you've led to this point.

Thank him for his faithfulness to you through the good times and the bad.

Thank him for the ways he's grown you and worked through you to bless others.

Ask the Lord to help you be good 'rememberers': people who don't forget what he's done for you in the past. Pray that he'll help you to live with confidence, faith, and hope in the present.

TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

You'll find takeaway ideas at the end of every session. These are an opportunity for you to engage with God and continue to work through the session's theme. There's no obligation to do all or any of these. But if you can, try to do the one or two that most appeal to you. There'll be an opportunity to share how you got on at the beginning of the next session.

Timeline: On a large piece of paper (you may need to attach a few pieces of paper together), draw a timeline of your life. Mark down significant moments for you (e.g. important events, changes of direction, key beginnings and endings, etc). As you do this, make some notes on how you saw (or now see) God's goodness and faithfulness. Once you've finished the timeline, use it as a stimulus to lament, confess, thank, and pray.

Psalm: Many of the psalms in the Bible are written memories of what God did for the nation of Israel (e.g. 106, 136), as well as what he did for individuals (e.g. 30, 116). Try writing your own psalm, recounting some of the ways God has been faithful to you over the course of your life. Don't worry about it being perfect poetry – just use the opportunity to express your heart.

Contact others: Perhaps now is a good opportunity to contact some people who've been significant in your life journey – people who've helped, supported, directed, or encouraged you along the way. These might be friends, former colleagues, fellow-parents, or pastors. Consider sending some cards or letters or arranging time for conversations. Be sure to let these people know how grateful you are for their good influence in your life.

Memory aid: If you enjoy designing or making things, paint, draw, make, or build something to put up in your home or garden that will remind you of God's faithfulness. Or, if you're not so crafty, you could write something short that reminds you of God's faithfulness, then put it somewhere you'll see it regularly – or you could simply frame a Bible verse.

Identity

IN MY RETIREMENT, WHO AM I?



Session aim: *To recognise that we may face questions of identity in retirement, and that to negotiate this season well we need to be sure of our identity in Christ.*



Checking in: *Before you get going with this session, did anybody have a go at any of the takeaway activities from session 1? If so, how did you get on?*

GETTING GOING

You know those moments where you get chatting to someone at a wedding, or at the local park? At some point, we all probably get asked, ‘So, what do you do?’ Sometimes there’s a nice, straightforward answer to that question: ‘I’m a nurse... I’m a pastor... I’m a full-time parent... I’m a civil engineer.’ And when we’re answering this question, we feel certain things about ourselves, and maybe we imagine what the person we’re talking to thinks and feels about us too. Rightly or wrongly, people make assumptions about other people based on what they do. What we do often forms a big part of our identity.

Then one day, we find ourselves retired, and we get asked, ‘What do you do?’ We pause for a moment. ‘I’m a...’ Hmm, how do we finish that sentence?

Back when we were 15 or 21, we probably explored identity questions with a fair amount of vigour: ‘What am I going to give my life to? Who am I now? And who might I become?’ When we enter into our later years, and we hang up our work boots, many of us find these identity questions resurfacing. For some, this is exciting; it’s a season of opportunity, possibility, and exploration. For others, it can be daunting, disorientating, depressing even. Now that I’m retired, who am I? And who might I become?



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- These days, how do you feel when somebody asks you the question, ‘What do you do?’
- How do you normally answer the question?

MEET CHARLES

In his book *This is Our Time*, author Trevin Wax tells the story of Charles M. Schulz, the creator of the Peanuts cartoons, which feature the iconic Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, and of course, Snoopy. Every day for 50 years, a new cartoon strip appeared, each dreamt up and sketched out by Schulz.

Tragically though, cancer brought Schulz face-to-face with retirement sooner than he was ready for. Wax explains how Schulz ‘vacillated between feelings of anger and despair’. In an interview near the end of his life, Schulz lamented having to lay down this cartoon series before he was ready. ‘I never dreamt this is what would happen to me... All of a sudden, it’s gone. It’s been taken away from me. I did not take this away from me, it was taken away from me.’

A close friend of the cartoonist shared how Schulz was not able to lay down his work ‘graciously’. Reflecting on Schulz’s life, his biographer, David Michaelis, made this observation: ‘To the very end, his life had been inseparable from his art. In the moment of ceasing to be a cartoonist, he ceased to be.’



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- To what extent do you think our sense of identity should be shaped by the work or activities we do?
- Thinking about the example of Charles M. Schulz, what might be the danger of a career or an activity being the foundation of our identity?
- To what extent do you see your own experience of retirement in the example of Schulz? What are the similarities and differences between his story and yours?

TURNING TO THE BIBLE

To at least some extent, people's identities have always been linked with the jobs they do. Many British surnames are based on the kind of work done by earlier generations; think 'Cook', 'Smith', and 'Weaver'. Even in the Bible, people are often referred to by the work they do, or an ability they have: Luke the *doctor*, Lydia the *purple cloth trader*, King David, Anna the *prophetess*. At least to some extent, it's inevitable that our identity will be linked to what we do.

But for the people of God, if we are going to live out our changing roles and identities well, whether that's as a grandparent, a board member, a carer, a volunteer, or whatever, it will help us tremendously if we are secure in our 'ultimate identity'. In both the Old and New Testaments, the biblical authors are always trying to help the people of God grasp their identity in light of who God is, and what he has done for us.

Take a look at Exodus 19:1–8

- At this point in the story, what has God already done for the Israelites? (vs 3–4)
- What does God say to the Israelites about their identity in vs 5–6? By entering into a covenant relationship with God, who do they become?
- What do you think some of these terms in vs 5–6 might mean?
- Picture the crowd with whom Moses first shared these words (v 7). What kinds of people do you think would have been part of that crowd? What age groups would have been represented?
- How do you think these former slaves might have felt being told they would be God's 'treasured possession' and a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation'?

Now take a look at what God says about his people in the New Testament.

- Colossians 3:12
- 1 Peter 2:9–10
- 1 John 3:1

When Paul, Peter, and John wrote these words to Christians in the first century AD, they were writing to mixed congregations: mixed ethnicities, mixed social positions, and mixed ages. And when Moses spoke to the Israelites, the young, the old, and everyone in between were included. The identity God gives us is enduring. A journey through life might take us from infant, to student, to apprentice, to worker, to manager, to semi-retired, to retired. Yet through every stage, we are God's dearly loved children, his royal priests, part of his holy nation.

- In what ways do these passages of Scripture speak to you about your identity?
- Do you think at some level, you try to find your ultimate identity from the things you do now or have done in the past?
- How might your day-to-day experience of life be different if you were more sure of your identity in Christ?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Again, read the words of Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 2:9–10, and 1 John 3:1.

You can choose to do this in silence, or ask someone in the group to read them out slowly. *After a few moments, bring the things you've discussed throughout this session before your loving heavenly Father in honest prayer.* Thank him for who you are in light of what Christ has done for you. Ask that he might help you to be more secure in your identity in him.



TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

Over the next few days, use Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 2:9–10, and 1 John 3:1 to remind yourself who you are. Use them as a launchpad for prayer and praise.

Some other things you might want to try:

Memorise: Commit one or all of these verses to memory, to get the words deeper into your heart and mind.

Create: If you enjoy getting creative, use these verses as inspiration to write a poem; paint a picture; or create something using fabric, wood, or some other material.

Print: Print out one or all of these verses, and put them somewhere you will see them regularly to remind you who you are.

Go for a walk: Try taking these verses for a walk. Simply go out for a walk and use these verses as a basis for a conversation with God.

Context

IN MY RETIREMENT, WHERE AM I?



Session aim: *To understand that we all have places where we connect with people who aren't Christians. To become more intentional in seeing these as places where God can grow us and work through us.*



Checking in: *Before you get going with this session, did anybody have a go at any of the takeaway activities from session 2? If so, how did you get on?*

GETTING GOING

Everything matters to God. Everything! Whether it feels spiritual or not, whether it feels significant or not, everything we do, every place we go, and every person we connect with matters to God. God's incredible plan for this world is not limited to particular places (like church buildings or our 'prayer chair'), or to particular activities (like outreach events and Bible reading). Yes, God is in these places, and he is involved in these activities – they really do matter. But his work of establishing his kingdom is not limited to them. Much of the work God does takes place on our 'frontlines'.

'Frontline' is a great word because it expresses a big concept simply. A frontline is any regular place or activity where we interact with people who aren't Christians.

Generally speaking, much of the UK church is really good at connecting with certain segments of the population through organised activities in or around our buildings. Perhaps we connect with parents and carers through toddler groups, with people who are lonely through lunch clubs, or people who are struggling to make ends meet through food banks and debt advice. These are an essential and powerful part of the church's witness to the world.

Yet there are many people who won't connect with us through these kinds of activities. And these people are everywhere. They're behind the reception desk at our local doctors' surgery. They're in swimming pools and bowls clubs. They're walking dogs by the river, serving on boards of organisations, and making thoughtful contributions in online book clubs. They're delivering shopping to your door, enjoying coffee at the local café, playing bridge in their retirement home, or reminding their children not to climb up the slide. Or they are the child climbing up the slide. How will these people see what Christian faith looks like in action? How will they even become remotely interested in Jesus, let alone commit their lives to him? Maybe the answer is through us, on our frontlines.



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- **What are the places and activities that bring you into contact with people who aren't Christians? In other words, where are your frontlines?**
- **Since retiring, what new frontlines have you gained, and how have existing frontlines changed?**



MEET CAROL, JAMES, AND VIVIAN

Carol is in her early 70s, and lives in a city in the southeast. When the covid pandemic hit, her regular supermarket set aside certain hours in which only those more at risk could shop. So, one Tuesday morning, there she was, queueing. Nervously. Quite quickly she noticed something strange was happening: people were actually talking to each other. It wasn't long before she was involved in a conversation, and it wasn't much longer before some people were sharing quite personal things about their fears and sense of loss. The next Tuesday morning, Carol prayed on her way to the supermarket, which wasn't something she normally did. But now, she recognised it was a frontline. Many of the same people were in the queue. And because she listened with such care, some people even began waiting for her outside the supermarket so they could continue the conversation in private after they had got their shopping. Carol was able to offer godly advice, to show the compassion of Christ, and to let people know she was praying for them.

James was in his late 70s when he moved to a new town. He had been praying, 'Father, at this stage in my life, how might I best use my time and my skills to serve others?' The answer came as he was strolling through town when he noticed a sign up in the library window: 'Wanted, Volunteer Computer Buddy. Apply within.' 'Hmm,' thought James. 'That's interesting.' During his working life, he'd developed a real interest in computers, and he thought maybe he could put what he'd learned to good use. During his time in the role, he helped people print off plane tickets for important trips and access their Universal Credit accounts so they didn't lose their benefits. He helped one man learn how to use a laptop, how to use a smartphone, how to avoid online scammers, and ultimately James walked with him through the most difficult season of this man's life: while he was dying of cancer.

Vivian is in her 80s. Due to a number of chronic health conditions, she doesn't leave the house much. She has carers in three times a day. Some of the carers who come into her home are absolutely lovely. Others treat Vivian more like a name on a list to be ticked. 'They are under a lot of pressure,' Vivian explains, 'It must be very difficult for them, and they don't get paid a lot.' Before each carer arrives, Vivian prays for them. Then, while they're in her home, she asks them questions about their lives, about how they're doing. She's sympathetic and encouraging, and for some of these carers, Vivian might just be the only person they really open up to. And when they're gone, she prays for them again – possibly the only person who's praying for them.



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- What strikes you about these stories?
- How would these stories be different if these people weren't aware that God could use them wherever they were?
- Do any of these stories help you see some of the places you spend your time in a new light?

TURNING TO THE BIBLE

Read 2 Kings 5:1–6

In the story that unfolds in 2 Kings 5, we most easily notice the ‘big characters’ like Naaman, the great military ruler of Aram, and Elisha, the great prophet of Israel. Yet without the other characters involved, this story would not have ended up being much of a story at all.

- How had Naaman’s life been going, and how was it beginning to unravel (v 1)?
- In verse 2 we are introduced to ‘a young girl’, whose name we never find out. How had she ended up in Naaman’s household?
- Before Naaman began suffering from this skin disease, to what extent do you think this young girl would have felt like she could make a difference for God in that place?
- Imagine if you were that girl, how might you have felt toward Naaman generally? And how might you have felt when you found out he had contracted a terrible skin disease?
- What action does she take (v 3)? What is surprising about her actions?

In the rest of the chapter, Naaman takes the girl’s advice, as well as the instruction relayed to him by Elisha’s servant (with a few twists and turns along the way). As a result, Naaman experiences God’s miraculous intervention. His health is completely restored.

- When you think about your frontlines, to what extent are they places you have chosen to be? How do you feel about the thought that these ordinary places might be where God can grow you and work through you?
- As you've been talking about your frontlines, are there ways you think God is already at work there, or prompting you to take some kind of action?
- As you've been discussing frontlines, if you feel like you have very little contact with people who aren't Christians, is there something you can do to change that?

PRAYING TOGETHER

In a quiet moment of reflection, **think about one frontline where you'd really like to see God move**. After a little bit of time, go around the group and have each person share which frontline they're thinking about. Then go around the group, with each person praying for the person to their left. Pray for the frontline that person shared, asking for God's blessing upon that person and that place.

If anyone isn't yet able to identify a frontline, pray that God would help them to see possibilities and opportunities.

If anyone doesn't feel comfortable praying out loud, perhaps speak some encouraging words to the person on your left instead. Or pray in silence and then indicate when you have finished praying.



TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

To help you become more aware of the significance of your frontline, why not try one or more of the following?

Read: Spend some time reading and rereading 2 Kings 5:1–6. Try imagining yourself into that young servant girl’s situation – what she had been through, how she could have felt. Then spend some time focusing on what she actually did. Then use what you have been thinking and feeling as a way to pray for yourself and your frontline.

Watch: Check out our short film about Sunil, a retiree, to see how he is serving God on his frontline. Search ‘Sunil the Retiree 6M People’ on YouTube, or find the video halfway down the page at licc.org.uk/6mpeople

Pray: Try using an ‘entry prayer’. As you’re about to enter a particular frontline (whether that’s as you enter a building, wait for a bus, or just before you make a call, or whatever) pray a simple prayer. You can use your own words, or you could pray something like: ‘Heavenly Father, thank you that by your Holy Spirit you are present with me in this place. Thank you that you love the people/ person I’m about to interact with. Help me bring the peace and blessing of Christ into this place.’

Write: Write or print the words, ‘And surely I am with you always’, which come at the end of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20, on a sticker. Place the sticker in your shoe, so you’re reminded Jesus is with you wherever you go.

Vocation

IN MY RETIREMENT, WHAT SHOULD I DO?



Session aim: *To be confident in the enduring call that God places upon all of our lives, and to explore what it means to live out our ultimate calling in our retirement years.*



Checking in: *You know what we're going to ask you by now, don't you? Before you get going with this session, did anybody have a go at any of the takeaway activities from session 3? If so, how did you get on?*

If you didn't do any of the activities, have any thoughts from last session stuck with you? Or have you noticed anything about your frontlines?

GETTING GOING

It's probably not a word you hear every day, but when you hear the word 'vocation', what does it make you think of? Who do you think it applies to?

Depending on the kind of church you belong to, it might make you think about a church minister or leader. Or perhaps you've heard it talked about in relation to some professions: people speak of being a teacher or a nurse or a doctor as a 'vocation'. But for those of us outside these spheres, it's possible we've never considered the possibility it might apply to us.

The word vocation comes from the Latin word 'vocare', which means 'to call'. So, the word vocation is about calling, which presumes there is 'a caller', someone who calls us to be or do something. The one who is calling us is none other than God himself. God is calling us! All of us.

You see, God doesn't just call a small percentage of people to a few narrowly-defined roles. He calls all of us in a myriad of ways (we'll think more about what this means throughout this session). But for now, know that God has a call on your life. Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you do (or don't do), you have a vocation.

In our society, retirement is normally associated with a different 'V' word: 'vacation'. For many, retirement is merely a time to do what they want to do, to finally enjoy life after many years of hard toil. While we might have some great 'vacations' if health and finances allow, ultimately, our retirement years are a season where we continue to respond to and live out our God-given vocation. As Billy Graham wrote in his later years, 'Old age has its challenges and is not for wimps, but God wants us to embrace it as part of his plan for our lives, and to look for the Lord's purpose in every circumstance and in every face or voice we encounter daily.'



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- **What do you think are the dangers of viewing retirement primarily as a vacation?**
- **How does it make you feel to think about your retirement years being a time of pursuing vocation?**



TURNING TO THE BIBLE

Breaking with tradition, in this session we'll take a look at the Bible before we get to the 'Meet...' section.

One of the keys to having a healthy and biblical understanding of calling is to zoom out before we zoom in. When it comes to discerning what God might be calling us to do, the temptation can be to jump to the details of our lives: our skills, passions, experiences, opportunities, and so forth. Doing this is important. But before we get there, we must first consider the ultimate calling God places upon all his people. If we're going to discern what God is calling us to do on our various frontlines in this season of our lives (this is sometimes referred to as our 'particular' calling), we must first think about our 'general' or 'ultimate' calling.

Take a look at the following portions of Scripture, reading each aloud. In your own words, summarise what each one says about God's calling. You may find it helpful to write down your summaries on this sheet as you go.

- Genesis 1:26–28
- Matthew 22:37–40
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Romans 1:5–6
- Romans 8:28–30
- 1 Peter 2:21



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- How do these verses enrich your understanding of what it means to be called by God?
- These verses are timeless and universal. In other words, they apply to all Christians, at all times, in all places. That means they apply to each one of us in every season of our lives, including our retirement years. How might having this broad understanding of God's ultimate calling upon all of us shape the way you approach your retirement years?

MEET THE 6MS

In sessions 2–4, we’ve explored who we are (our identity), we’ve thought about where we are (our frontlines), and today we’ve started to think about our purpose (our vocation). As we do this, it’s helpful to start thinking about how these things fit together – to consider what living out our identity and purpose might *look like* on our frontlines.

At LICC, we’ve developed a framework to help you do this called ‘the 6Ms’. Each M is a way to help us see how we’re already living out God’s purposes on our frontlines, as well as providing us with inspiration for how we might live even more fruitfully in those places going forward. Many people in all seasons of life have found the 6Ms to be both affirming and eye-opening, helping them discern what it means to live with purpose in their daily lives.

Here’s a brief explanation of each of the Ms, along with a real-life example.

- M1** **Modelling godly character** is about how our words, actions, and attitudes reflect the character of Christ to others. This is something Craig and Nikki do when they choose not to gossip about other people at their tennis club, but instead choose to speak positively about others.
- M2** **Making good work** means doing our tasks to the best of our ability, by the grace of God, so that our work is of good quality and blesses other people. Katie does this when she buys toys and activities for her grandchildren that she knows will suit each child’s interests – because she’s putting work into getting to know the kids well, spending time on researching the right gift, and making wise purchases as a result.
- M3** **Ministering grace and love** means channelling the grace and love God has shown us to others. Scott did this when he retrained as a counsellor after he finished work as a lawyer. In his working life, he’d recognised the stress and mental health problems many in that profession face, and he wanted to do something practical to help people still in the game.
- M4** **Moulding culture** is what we do when we help shape our frontlines to become more like the places God would want them to be. Virat and Anika have done this by inviting neighbours over for lunches in aid of charity, and for mulled wine and mince pies at Christmas. Events like these, and their willingness to be there for people, have helped generate a greater sense of belonging and community on their busy street.

M5 **Being a mouthpiece for truth and justice** is about standing up for what's right and fair on our frontlines. Elizabeth does this as a board member for a social housing organisation. She asks good questions to make sure the executives are telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And she probes further if she suspects they are failing to do this.

M6 **Being a messenger of the gospel** is telling people the good news about Jesus and his kingdom. Joy did this after she'd got to know her postman quite well, and they were having a conversation about the meaning of Easter.



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- As you look at these 6Ms, how do they help you see ways you might already be living out God's purposes for you on your frontlines? Share any examples that come to mind.
- Do the 6Ms give you any ideas for what it might mean to be even more fruitful on your frontlines? Again, share specific examples.
- There are some frontlines we don't necessarily choose to be on, and some frontline situations can be really challenging. How might the 6Ms help you discover purpose in these places?
- It's important for us to draw the link between what we looked at in session 2 (our identity in Christ), and this session (our purpose). Why do you think it's important to be confident in our identity as we seek to live out God's purposes in our day-to-day lives?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Take a moment to be silent together. **What one thing from this session do you really want to hold onto?** Take a few moments to think about that, then go around the group, with each person sharing their one thing. To ensure you have enough time to pray, try to share your thoughts in just one or two sentences. Once everyone has shared, take some time to pray for each other.

TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

Reflect on your day: Over the next week or so, take 10 minutes every evening to reflect on the day you've had. Think about the different places you've been, the activities you've done, the people you've seen or talked to. Do this even if you think you haven't really done much. As you review the various 'chapters' of that day, what do you sense God's purpose was for you in those moments? Are there ways he might be wanting to show you the significance of a particular moment, or ways he's been with you, or ways he's been at work through you? Give thanks for what you notice.

Revisit the passages: Look back over the Bible verses you looked at in this session. Are there one or two that particularly stand out? Over the next week or so, revisit that verse/those verses each day, allowing the words to soak into your heart, and to propel you into prayer and thanksgiving.

Think about your frontline(s): As you think about each frontline you identified in the last session, ask God to help you to see how you are already bearing fruit there, and what it might mean for you to be even more fruitful. Take another look at the 6Ms to help you do this.

Use these four As. A big part of discerning vocation is working out how we live out our ultimate calling in the specifics of where we already are. As well as that, sometimes God is calling us to do new things, or to go to new places. You might find it helpful to use the four As below, developed by Amy Sherman, to discern what new thing God might be calling you to do. The four As are as follows:

- **Abilities:** What are you good at?
- **Affections:** What do you care about?
- **Aches:** Where do you encounter the brokenness of the world?
- **Anchors:** What are the realistic circumstances of your life? ¹

As you think about your answers to each of these, are there any opportunities you might want to explore? You may find it helpful to have a conversation about this with a friend, or with a leader from your church community.

¹ Sherman's model is used and adapted in Michael W. Goheen & Jim Mullins, *The Symphony of Mission: Playing your Part in God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Academic, 2019), 149-157.

Growth

IN MY RETIREMENT, HOW CAN I KEEP GROWING?



Session aim: *To dispel the myth that retirement is a season of decline, and to recognise it as a time where significant growth can happen.*



Checking in: *Before you get going with this session, did anybody have a go at any of the takeaway activities from session 4? If so, how did you get on?*

If you didn't do any of the activities, have any thoughts from last session stuck with you? Have you had any further thoughts about what it means to respond to God's call on your life?

GETTING GOING

Life is characterised by growth. Living things grow. Plants grow, pelicans grow, people grow. We enjoy seeing children grow, and we ourselves experience growth throughout our lifetimes: in our bodies, in our minds, in our emotions – it's the way God designed life to be. Yet while we associate life with growth, we don't always associate the ageing process with growth. We often think of life like a hill: we grow and make progress in the first half of life, reach a plateau, and then steadily (or even rapidly) decline.

Of course, with ageing comes some element of decline to many of our faculties: our skin becomes a little thinner, our muscles a little weaker, our brains a little slower (though of course some people are fitter, healthier, and sharper in their later years than they are in their middle years). Whatever the trajectory of our physical and mental capabilities, as followers of Jesus, there is the possibility we can continue to grow as people, even as our bodies decline. As the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 'Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.'



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- What are some of the ways you've grown over the past few years in your character, your outlook, or in the way you approach life? You may find it helpful to think about this from the perspective of people who know you well – what changes do you think they might have noticed?

TURNING TO THE BIBLE

Psalm 92 was used in corporate worship by the ancient Israelites. It reminded those who sung these words that it's good to praise God, why it makes sense to 'sing for joy'. It highlights the folly of living life without getting to know God, and the incredible blessing experienced by those who do live with God – a blessing that lasts a lifetime and beyond.

Read Psalm 92

- What two kinds of trees does the psalmist compare the righteous to in verse 12?
- To the best of your knowledge, what are the main characteristics of these trees? And why is it good to be like them?
- Where are these trees situated (v 13)? What does that indicate about the relationship to God we can have?
- According to verse 14, what happens to the righteous as they grow old?
- How does this contrast with what happens to those who do not know God (vs 6–9)?

This Psalm wasn't just truth for people in ancient Israel, it remains true for God's people today. Its imagery is both powerful and prophetic.

- How does what Psalm 92 says about old age challenge some of the assumptions our society makes about ageing?
- Does it challenge any of your assumptions about your retirement years?
- What might it mean for you to 'bear fruit in old age', and to stay 'fresh and green'?

MEET MARTIN

As Martin drew close to retiring, he and his wife, Myra, had godly plans for how they would spend the next season of their life: leading and teaching within their local church, using their skills and experience on the board of a charity or two, visiting places they'd always wanted to go, and having more time to invest in family and friends.

But not long into retirement, Martin noticed that Myra was changing. This intelligent and gracious lady became forgetful, began acting out of character, and was frequently frustrated. She was experiencing the early stages of posterior cortical atrophy, a form of Alzheimer's. Retirement was not going to look as they had both planned.

As Myra's health went down, her dependency on Martin went up. For Martin, this meant navigating new terrain, like cooking, cleaning, and Comfort fabric softener. Not only were his domestic skills honed, his character was too.

'It's a constant battle to get her fed, washed, and dressed... Then there's the maze of social services you have to work through. Drawing on the grace of God is absolutely essential; there's no two ways about that. Every day I pray for the compassion, strength, sensitivity, calmness, and humility I need to look after her.'

Martin began to see his prayers being answered, and his family and friends noticed the difference too. 'I'm much more tolerant with other people and the mistakes and wrong choices they make... I have grown far more as a Christian in these circumstances than I would have done if this had never happened, although I wish I wasn't in this situation. I would like to think that my life is more Christ-like now than it was at the beginning of all this. I love God more and I love my neighbour more than I used to.'

His feet carried the gospel to new places too: family members and former colleagues became more open to hearing about the difference God was making in Martin's life. Then there were the conversations with fellow carers, who struggled with many of the same things Martin did. He even got to talk about the transforming and sustaining grace of God to a room full of health professionals at an Alzheimer's conference.

Since Martin shared his story with us, he has gone to be with the Lord, but the testimony of his life continues to speak.

- In what ways did Martin bear fruit?
- What does his story say to you about God's ability to keep growing us, even if we find ourselves in unwanted or unexpected situations?
- One of the characteristics Martin exhibited was flexibility. Many people who flourish in their retirement years demonstrate this quality too. Why do you think being flexible might be particularly important in this season of life?
- As you reflect on Psalm 92 and on Martin's story, is there an aspect of character you would really like to grow in over the coming months and years?
- As Martin continued to grow, it wasn't just for his benefit. Others benefited too: his wife, his family and friends, other carers, and so forth. If you were to grow in that aspect of character you just mentioned, what difference might that make to the people you live with, the people you fellowship with, and the people on your frontlines?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Spend a few moments in silence, thinking about God's desire to help you grow in this season of life. Imagine what it would look and feel like for you to grow in that characteristic you just talked about. Picture yourself exhibiting that character in those places where you spend your time during a typical week.

After a few minutes of silent reflection, have somebody read Psalm 92:12–15 aloud, slowly and purposefully.

Then, enjoy a time of open prayer together. **Bring the things you've talked about to the Lord** who is 'Most High... Exalted forever', the one who is our 'Rock'. Thank him that as you live with him, you will continue to grow and to bear fruit.

TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

Over the centuries, many Christians who have wanted to grow have found it helpful to develop what is often referred to as a ‘rule of life’. You may be familiar with this expression, or it might sound a bit strange. Essentially, it means a life-giving pattern, which provides healthy balance and structure to how we live. A rule of life is a bit like a trellis, providing structure and shape to a growing plant. Aspects of this ‘trellis’ will include spiritual disciplines, such as reading Scripture, praying, fellowshiping, journaling, and fasting. Over the years, many have found Richard *Foster’s Celebration of Discipline* really helpful. More recently, many have benefited from reading and putting into practice *The Common Rule* by Justin Whitmel Earley. Though it is written by a relatively young guy, many of the practices he endorses are applicable across the lifespan. Consider buying or borrowing one of these books and experimenting with some of the practices they teach.

Discover: Find a tree that you like and are likely to see regularly – a tree that symbolises solidness, maturity, beauty, and growth. Think about what is enabling this tree to flourish. Each time you see or pass that particular tree, let it act as a prompt to thank God that he continues to grow and mature you.

Memorise: As you may have done with some of the other Bible passages from earlier sessions, commit Psalm 92:12–15 to memory. If you like to get creative, you could write it out in nice handwriting, or paint or make something inspired by these verses.

Pray: Take some time to prayerfully reflect on Psalm 92:12–15. As you look at these words in the presence of God, is there somebody you know who God might be wanting to encourage with these words? If so, why not share them with that person, whether that’s through a letter, an email, a phone call, or in person.

Legacy

IN MY RETIREMENT, HOW MIGHT I PASS ON MY FAITH AND WISDOM TO OTHERS?



Session aim: *To recognise the lasting impact our lives can have on others, particularly younger generations, and to think about what we could pray and do in light of that.*



Checking in: *Before you get going with this session, did anybody have a go at any of the takeaway activities from session 5? If so, how did you get on?*

If you didn't do any of the activities, have any thoughts from the last session stuck with you? Have you been praying any prayers or taking any steps to help you keep growing?

GETTING GOING

The wonderful thing about life in general, and particularly about life with God, is that at every stage and season, we can have a positive impact on others. The reality that each of us can make a lasting difference in the lives of others is something people of every age should be aware of. It's something we should all be hoping and praying for. It's a big aspect of our vocation, a way that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

Many people, as they approach and move through their retirement years, find themselves thinking about their legacy more and more. What impact has my life had on others so far? What difference have I made? And how can I best use the time I have left to sow into the generations to follow?

We thought about some of the ways we've already made a difference in session 1 (Rear-View). In this session, we'll explore how we might best invest our time so that we not only get the best out of ourselves, but that we might also bring the best out of others. This session is inspired by a quote from the psychologist Robert Kegan. He said this: 'Who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes.'



DISCUSS TOGETHER:

- Who has significantly shaped your journey of faith?
- What was it about that person that impacted you?



TURNING TO THE BIBLE

In modern Western society, there's often an assumption that anything good and new will be done by the young and for the young. But that does not accord with the way things happen in the Bible. In the Bible, God has a role for all generations – the young, the old, and everyone in between.

One of the best examples of God working through a range of generations to bring about something new is the birth of his Son, Jesus. Mary and Joseph were definitely at the younger end of the age spectrum. The ages of the shepherds and the Magi are not disclosed. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, are described as 'well on in years'. Simeon, who met the infant Jesus in the temple, was no spring chicken, and the prophet Anna, who did likewise, was 84. As we think about legacy, we'll focus on these last two people.

Read Luke 2:21–38

First, take a look at Simeon (2:25–35), and then at Anna (2:36–38).

- What do you notice about their character?
- In what ways do you see them living out that great call to love God and love others?
- How did they play their part in what God was doing at that time?
- What does the Bible say (and what do you suspect) their impact was on Mary and Joseph?

As you answer the next few questions, bear in mind that Simeon and Anna had a one-off encounter with Mary and Joseph, and this was a significant part of their legacy. Sometimes God does big things in short bursts. But much of our legacy will be shaped by long-term, ongoing involvement in people's lives.

- The birth of Jesus was a pretty significant event! It has left quite a legacy. As Luke describes the events around the birth of Jesus in chapters 1 and 2, he goes to great lengths to describe how God was at work in and through older people. What does this suggest to you about the potential impact we can have on others in our later years?
- How do the examples of Simeon and Anna inspire you to be somebody who encourages, blesses, and prays for younger generations?

- Is there a specific young person, or specific young people, in whom God might be calling you to invest more time, and to pray for consistently?
 - » How could you go about doing this?
 - » How might the 6Ms you learnt about in session 4 help you pray for and encourage this person or these people?

MEET THE MOURNERS

Everyone's there: family members, friends from church, former colleagues, even your best friend from school. There's a long table in the kitchen, spread with a red tablecloth, loaded with sandwiches, sausage rolls, couscous salad – there are even those lovely salmon hors d'oeuvres. Emotions mix in the air to become one hybrid emotion: joy-grief. With a glass of something-or-other in hand, everyone is mingling. Some of the chat is about them: what they've been up to for the last 30 years, memories of the last time they were together, comments about the salmon hors d'oeuvres. But some of the conversation is about you. You. The main reason they've gathered here at this wake.

To help us think about how we want to live, it can be helpful to think about how we'll be remembered when we die. The person we become, and the impact we have on others, will shape the conversations people have about us when we pass. What legacy might you create?

Use the table to think about some key areas of life, how you would like to be remembered in those places, and something you think God might be calling you to start praying or doing in that area. Depending on how much time you have as a group, you may want to think about just one or two of these areas in the session, and the others by yourselves. It's your call.

Once you've had some time to think through the table, go around the group, with each person sharing what they have written/thought about for one area that particularly stands out. What legacy would you like to leave in that area, and what do you sense God might be calling you to do or pray over the coming months?

AREA OF LIFE	THE LEGACY YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE	THINGS GOD IS PROMPTING YOU TO PRAY OR DO IN THIS AREA
Your church community		
Your family		
Where you live		
One of your frontlines		

PRAYING TOGETHER

Pray that the lives you lead now will have a great impact on the people you come into contact with, and upon the generations who will follow. In other words, pray for your legacies.

After you've prayed

In this session we've looked at Anna and Simeon; two people who were like the trees depicted in Psalm 92. Despite everything they faced in their lives, they bore fruit in old age, they stayed fresh and green.

With their example in mind, go around the group and bless one another. You can do this using your own words, or you might want to use the words below. Alternatively, you could simply read the words together, leaving out names.

'[Name], God has good plans for you in this season of your life. He will continue to be with you, to grow you, and to work through you. You will bear fruit in this season.'

TAKEAWAY ACTIVITIES

Complete the table: If you didn't finish completing the table in the session, spend some time thinking about it and filling it in. You will probably find it helpful to speak to somebody from the group once you have done this.

Connect: Continue to think about the younger person/people God laid on your heart in the session. Think about a good way to connect with them and encourage them at this time, and then do it.

Read: There are many Christian books on the theme of retirement, some better than others. One of the best to help you grow in daily discipleship is *An Uncommon Guide to Retirement: Finding God's Purpose for the Next Season of Life*, by Jeff Haanen. You can find it through any major online bookseller.

Arrange a conversation: If you feel that God has been speaking to you through this course, if there are things you want to talk through more, or if there are the questions you are exploring, why not arrange a chat with a leader from your church, a mentor, or a spiritual director?

Moving on from here

If you want to continue thinking about serving God with the whole of your life, including on your everyday frontlines, check out these LICC resources.



Fruitfulness on the Frontline: Combining biblical teaching from Mark Greene and inspiring real-life stories, these eight video-based sessions will help you and your group see how you can make a difference on your frontlines and support one another along the way.

licc.org.uk/fruitfulness



The Gateway Seven Bible study series: We've selected seven books of the Bible representing seven genres: Proverbs (Wisdom), Exodus (Law), 1 Peter (Letters), Ezekiel (Prophecy), Ruth (Narrative), Mark (Gospel), and Revelation (Apocalyptic). The mini-features sprinkled through the studies, along with the questions and thoughts for discussion, help you understand each book within its background and genre as well as the content of the book itself. Each study has been crafted with the same desire: to offer a gateway to a deeper love of God's word and richer insights into its implications for all of life, Monday through Sunday.

licc.org.uk/gateway-seven



Word for the Week: These free weekly emails offer a short reflection on a biblical passage from a frontline perspective. They're designed to help you apply a passage of Scripture to your everyday life: at home, in the workplace, or wherever you are.

licc.org.uk/wordfortheweek

And be sure to look out for our forthcoming resource, **Growing on the Frontline**, later in the year. This small group study will help you explore what it means to be emotionally and spiritually healthy and mature as a frontline disciple, and provide you with tools to help you grow.



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