

GROWING THROUGH
GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
IN EVERY CHAPTER

seasons of change



Carol is married to Robin, and they have three grown up boys.

Having recently retired from a teaching career, she's been reflecting on the changes she's experienced and the things God has been teaching her.

When you thought ahead to retiring what hopes and expectations did you have?

I was teaching three days a week and had been working for 36 years with just a little time off for children, two of whom have ADHD. My husband Robin had worked long hours and travelled for many of those years.

Robin took the plunge three and a half years before me. He is a lay reader at our local church in Hassocks and immediately was busy when he retired with all sorts of activities.

But I didn't feel ready to retire. I had lots of doubts. How would I fill my time? Would I still feel needed? Would I be bored? Was I going to be at home cooking and cleaning? Did I feel old, entering the next phase of life? I hoped that I would find some voluntary work, something meaningful and worthwhile.

Circumstances changed at the school where I was teaching. I'd had a difficult couple of years as Head of Department and all that entails. Robin was encouraging me to finish so we could go on holiday somewhere more exotic.

So, in the summer of 2018, I retired.

You very deliberately chose to give yourself a year. What made you decide to do that? How did it help?

When I retired, I had led a busy life for 39 years and wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Someone advised me not to rush into anything and that was sound advice for me. So, I went on holiday as the schools went back in that September and was able to visit friends in Northern Ireland too and we started planning a trip to New Zealand.

After that I spent time seeing friends, gardening, cycling and going to exercise classes. I needed to have something to get up for in the morning. That was very important for me.

Robin and I are different, he needs space to manage time with people and I need people to manage time on my own. During this first year I also joined a rota to help with the local foodbank.

People are different and some want to continue that busyness. But committing to something long term may be a mistake as you actually don't know how you will feel. Life slows down when you retire because it can, there is more time to think and plan for what is actually right for you. I suppose looking back, this was God given time to rest and heal. I know it is important to serve him but prayer and time were needed when seeking his guidance, especially after the years of work and stress.

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How would I fill my time?

Would I still feel needed?

Would I be bored?

Have there been some losses and disappointments associated with this change for you?

Covid turned things upside down. I had to spend much more time at home occupying myself and having WhatsApp and zoom calls. Also, I had lost my father a little before I retired and having been his main carer, I felt this keenly.

I missed being needed and the encouragement I received through my job from colleagues. I also missed the children in school and those colleagues who were also friends.

However, overall, there have been fewer disappointments than I thought and far more positives. Just as you get used to having children or changing jobs, you grow into retirement and that is why it was right for me to have some time off at the beginning.

What new beginnings and opportunities have there been?

Apart from the foodbank, I now help with creche for Coffee Plus. It's good to be able to give back after all I received when attending coffee plus myself. I am involved in a homegroup in Hassocks and support older church members who are lonely and some housebound.

Robin and I have cycled over 2,000 miles since the first lockdown and seeing more of the local area has been a bonus especially in good weather. I am a keen crafts person and have been attending courses locally. I am at present making a patchwork quilt, it is good to learn new skills. I enjoy reading the newspaper in a more leisurely way and not having to get up quite so early, especially on cold, dark mornings. There are opportunities to drop everything and go to a National Trust Garden or similar if the weather is good.

What has God shown you about yourself and your identity through retiring?

I realise how much I need to be occupied! But I'm learning that I don't need to be a teacher to have self-worth and identity. I know in theory that I am God's precious daughter, but I'm still working on actually believing that his love really is for me, Carol!

God has given me purpose through the ongoing care for my children. They still need me, even if only to pray for them every day.

God's also helping me get to know Him better. I have put Him on a back burner for years and now have time to give to him. I am on my third year of reading the Bible in a year, and I have time to think what God is teaching me. How do I need to change to be more like him?

On a women's weekend away at Horsley Park (recommended!) I heard about Titus women. It's a sort of mentoring that All Saints offers. Two people get together, perhaps a new Christian and an experienced one. They maybe study a part of the Bible together or a Christian book and they learn from each other and learn more about God.

I wanted to do this, and I was paired up with a partner. It has been part of a way back to God for me at this new stage of life. I have learnt again to talk about God and to work through things that concern me in a safe and sharing environment.

What has God shown you about himself?

He has been upholding me for years when I have only been giving him lip service. I literally squeezed God into a compartment of Sunday morning and Wednesday night at homegroup. I do feel that I have missed out on years of God's comfort and support but knew he was waiting for me to come back.

I talk to God more now and have time to run a decision by him before I need to act. God has given me so many blessings and is patient and kind in how he deals with me. He knows when I really need help, like a parking spot (I am disabled and can't walk far). If I give each day to God, I trust he will be with me whatever happens.

What would you say to someone else who is coming up to retirement or struggling with it?

If you are coming up to retirement, forced or otherwise, give yourself time to get used to it, however long it takes. Ask God to show you what he would like you to do. Talk to others in the same position. Try to go part time if possible before the main event so you are used to having days off and can learn to occupy some of your time or just enjoy more time. It is scary to enter the next stage of life and some people do treat the retired differently. Embrace it, do something you have wanted to do all your life.



The U3A is one organisation with a variety of activities. I still have down days when I have too much time and the weather is foul but there are many more positive days. Oh, and I always say that you are never bored if you belong to a church, there is always something to do!

A couple of God's promises have been particularly real and encouraging to me over the last years.

In Jeremiah 29:11 He says:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

And Proverbs 3:5-6 is the best life advice:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight."

