

Reflections

February 2026

Retirement as Jubilee

By Angeline D. Brauer

Retirement offers a rare gift: time to reflect on what truly matters—health, purpose, and how we care for ourselves and others. Some of the most practical guidance on this comes from an unexpected place: the book of Leviticus.

The bulk of the 27 chapters of Leviticus describe God giving instructions through Moses to Aaron or the Israelites. In a book written for and about the work of the priests, there are only four instances recorded where God speaks directly to Aaron, the high priest. The Almighty God felt there were some things that needed to be spoken directly to the official representative of the “church workers” of the day.

What did God talk about those four times? Here’s a quick look:

1. **Leviticus 11:1**, followed by a detailed description of clean and unclean foods.
2. **Leviticus 13:1**, diagnosis and confinement of individuals afflicted with infectious skin diseases (under the general term leprosy) and cleansing of their clothing.
3. **Leviticus 14:33**, infectious agent (likely mold or mildew) afflicting a house.
4. **Leviticus 15:1**, spread of bodily fluids (saliva, semen, blood).

In these passages, God is specifically calling attention to health-related issues, and how to avoid unwittingly spreading an illness to others. If



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ANGELINE D. BRAUER
DrPH, MHS, RDN

Health Ministries Director,
North American Division of
Seventh-day Adventists

you are reading this, it is likely that you have retired from denominational employment. What could this possibly mean for you, at your current phase of life?

Retirement is a major life event. It is a significant transition that seems to sneak up on us as we are distracted by hard work. Research shows there is no single pathway for health in retirement.¹ It can be a time of marked loneliness, loss of physical health and ability to move and socially interact with others. Grief and loss may become our frequent companions as our social network changes. For some, particularly those living in a low socioeconomic status environment, the retirement years are accompanied with higher rates of mental illness and chronic disease.

Retiring can also be accompanied with increased life satisfaction, an initial decrease in stress levels related to the job, greater freedom and flexibility. It may finally give you the time to truly rest during the Sabbath—often a rarity among church employees. An individual’s experience is impacted by several factors, including financial situation, social activities, health conditions, and—importantly—preparation for retirement.²

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The last point—preparation—brings us to one of the most hope-filled instructions given by God. It is also recorded in Leviticus, chapter 25, and is known as the “year of jubilee.” God instructed the Israelites to observe a sabbath year after six years of labor, and after seven such cycles, a fiftieth-year

jubilee. This was not simply a small farewell party, but rather a full year of rest for people, animals, and the land. It included restoring land and property that was lost to families due to financial limits. Debtors were forgiven of their debts and their family heritage restored. Liberty was proclaimed throughout the nation, and everyone was to return to their family. There would be no sowing or reaping, but God promised to provide sufficient food for their needs.

The jubilee was a time for rest, restoration, and reconnecting with God and family.

I’ve noticed that “retirement” for an Adventist employee often means continuing to work, but on a part-time or volunteer basis. There is good in this. It can provide a continual source of income. It offers opportunity to stay in contact with others, and to stay active in mind and body. But let’s be honest, could it sometimes be because we are unable to “let go” of what we once had? The job title, the travel, brushing shoulders with certain people, the recognition . . . could these be reasons why we don’t observe a “jubilee”? It could be unconscious or unintended. Or perhaps we never learned how to observe the rhythms of rest that would have prepared us for a true jubilee?

Whatever your situation, however you may have lapsed in your experience of rest, it is not too late to redeem the time. This will look different for each one of us. It may involve letting go of certain responsibilities. Or trading one for another that truly embodies the spirit of the year of jubilee. It may include making time to reconnect with your roots—to remember and recount the journey of

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service that God led you through. Maybe there are some wrongs to right—friends or colleagues that need to hear words of peace and forgiveness.

God desires that His workers would not simply survive through this earthly journey, but to prosper in health and spirit (3 John 2). For some, this may mean redefining service; for others, protecting rest, health, and relationships with the same intentionality once given to work. ■

¹ GP Vigezzi et al, Impact of retirement transition on health, well-being and health behaviours: critical insights from an overview of reviews. *Social Science & Medicine* (2025).

² IGP Silva et al, Factors associated with quality of life in retirement: a systematic review. *Rev Bras Med Trab* (2023).



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9705 Patuxent Woods Drive | Columbia, MD 21046



AdventistRetirement | www.adventistretirement.org

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