

Is 75 Years Really Long Enough to Live?

It's been a month since Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel's controversial article, "Why I Hope to Die at 75" was released. But I still feel compelled to comment. For those who haven't read it, check out the October issue of *The Atlantic*.

Dr. Emanuel, the director of the Clinical Bioethics Department at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, believes 75 years is plenty of time for anyone to spend in the "land of the living." Why? For several reasons, one of which is health care cost. The chronic diseases that come with age can be pretty expensive to manage.

But he gives a few other reasons such as:

- **PRODUCTIVITY.** Dr. Emanuel notes productivity peaks around age forty to fifty. From there, it goes downhill.
- **SPEED.** Here, he uses his father's experience as an example. At age 77, the senior Emanuel suffered a heart attack. Afterwards, he walked and talked at a noticeably slower pace. Though still able to live independently, Dr. Emanuel's assessment of his Dad was that "everything seems sluggish."
- **MEMORIES.** Here's the rationale on this one: After we're gone, our kids and grandkids will be able to reflect on times when we had energy and vitality. Nobody should want to be remembered as being frail and sick.

Of course, I was disturbed by the article. I was especially troubled because Dr. Emanuel has a significant influence on health care policy. What I found most unsettling was the question of value, specifically, *what makes a life valuable*. And if we base value on age, then it won't be long until we add other criteria like race, ethnicity, IQ, disabilities and socioeconomic status into the equation.

In his article, Dr. Emanuel does not address the question: *Who determines the value of a human life?* So let me give the answer. God. Only God. Our heavenly Father has already assessed our value, and called it *good* , even *very good* (Gen. 1:27, 31). And because His *agape* love is unconditional, we can be confident that nothing will diminish our value in His sight. So whether we are young or old, rich or poor, black or white—God loves us!

Our challenge then is to see other people the way God sees them: Made in His image, and *valuable*!

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