

THE MID-LIFE CRISIS

INTRODUCTION

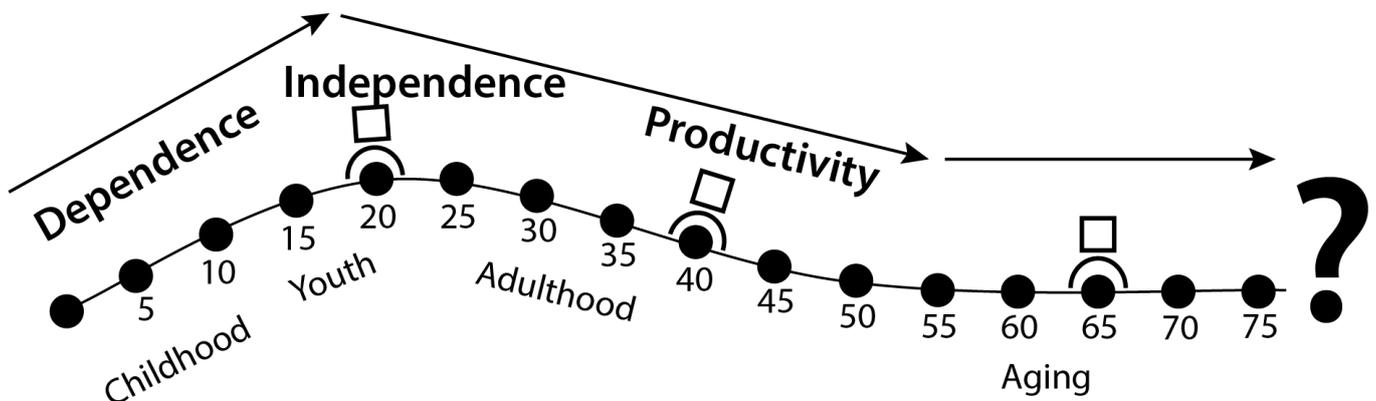
Psalm 12:1 “Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men.”

How often have you heard of a godly man who has fallen? A faithful man who seemed to suddenly collapse under the circumstances of life and turned his back on everything he had stood for? What happened? What went wrong? Will it happen to you?

We are not talking about young men who’ve only been saved a few years. We are talking about mature men. Men who have served the Lord. Men who have been faithful. Why do they fall? Obviously this is an age-old question because David asked this same thing in Psalm 12. Where are they? Where have they gone? We are going to talk about some of the difficulties men face in mid-life. As a matter of fact these problems are almost predictable and have taken on the name “*mid-life crisis*.” What is a mid-life crisis? It is a time of intense personal evaluation when frightening and disturbing thoughts surge through the mind, posing questions about who I am and why I’m here and what difference does it make. It is a period of self-doubt and disenchantment with everything familiar and stable. It represents terrifying thoughts that can’t be admitted or revealed even to those closest to us. These anxieties can produce an uncomfortable separation between loved ones at a time when support and understanding are desperately needed.

We are going to take a few minutes to look at some of the different stages of a man’s life.

I. DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF LIFE



Here is a chart that gives the over-all picture of life. You can see from birth till roughly age 20 a child is dependent on someone else. He is developing physically, mentally, socially and growing towards coming independence. Somewhere, mostly between the ages of 18 and 25, he moves into the adult world, reaches his peak physically, begins to support himself, decides on his profession, marries. Not all of these things happen at the same time, but this is the crisis of entering adulthood. The transition may be made quickly and easily, or it may be a time of difficult and frustrating decisions, depending on circumstances. But youth has strength and optimism and energy on its side and so man moves on into independence.

After the age of 25 a man slowly begins to deteriorate physically. You will see this in the area of many sports where it is very rare for a man over 40 to be in professional competitions. And because there is this usually slow, but very steady, deterioration a man begins to evaluate who he is and what he has done. This can bring on the second crisis what is now called a *mid-life crisis*. A time when a man looks back to youth and potential and compares it with what is ahead--old age and death. As he passes through this time, and depending on how he handles it, he then moves into the really productive years of life because even though physical strength is waning, he has gained the wisdom and experience to conquer in many fields of expertise.

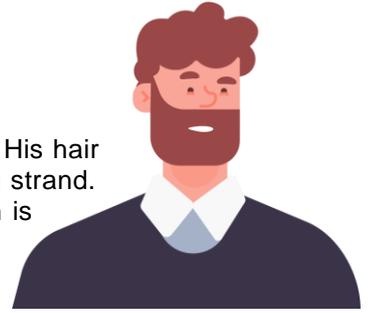
The third crisis period for a man is when he retires, perhaps at the age of 65. If he is not well prepared for that time, he will probably spend the rest of his days looking back to his youth—the good old days.

This just gives you a bit of an overview of life. We are going to focus now on the mid-life crisis itself.

II. AGING AND THE MID-LIFE CRISIS

A. Body

As a man enters his mid-life years he begins to see the effects in his own body. His hair is falling out, despite desperate attempts to coddle and protect every remaining strand. Then he notices he doesn't have the stamina he once had. His 16-year old son is already on the fifth floor while he is puffing his way up the stairs on the third floor. When he looks in the mirror he sees lines he didn't have before and there seems to be an extra tire around his middle. Some of these signs are the first concerns of a man 40 and older. He is forced to admit



1. that he is getting older;
2. the changes produced by aging are neither attractive nor convenient;
3. in a world that equates human worth with youth and beauty he is about to suffer a personal devaluation.

Which brings us to the issue of his ego.

B. Ego (giant mood swings)

As a man feels some of these physical changes and realizes that life is not permanent, he may begin to feel insecure about himself. Maybe he's been in the same job for years and sees the same monotonous years looming before him. He suddenly realizes that he isn't going to become famous, or rock the world with his exploits and his ego suddenly becomes a very fragile thing, easily threatened. He may see himself as being trapped by a family who depends on his bringing home money to maintain their little apartment and buy food and clothing. Maybe he just thought he might get ahead and he is laid off work, or a medical crisis comes that drains off all the carefully saved money. He isn't who he thought he was going to be and he begins to feel trapped in his circumstances. As he feels threatened he can begin to have mood swings causing him to fall into depression. Or maybe he suddenly goes and spends a lot of money on fancy new clothes or something else that, at least for the moment, make him feel good about himself. Through a strange manipulation of logic, a man often blames God for all his troubles, approaching Him with rebellion and anger. In return, he feels condemned and abandoned and unloved by God. The consequence is a weakened faith and a crumbling system of beliefs. This explains, more than anything else, the radical changes in behavior that often accompany the struggles of middle life.

C. Social life

When a man reaches the age of 50 he is the result of all the choices he has made. If he looks around himself and doesn't like what he sees, he may look other places for satisfaction or happiness. A wife may be totally distressed to see her husband, seemingly overnight, change from a stable, loving husband and father to an irresponsible rogue. He may quit going to church, start flirting with other women, lose interest in his own children. He may change his appearance, combing his hair differently to cover baldness, wearing "teen" clothes, turning away from the activities and friends he once had.

III. WHEN DOES THE CRISIS COME?

Usually between the ages of 40 to 50 a man begins to look at his life and evaluate it. He may even have several small crises. Many of these are based around whether he has taken the secular view of life or whether he has firmly taken hold of God's view. There are different things that can actually initiate a crisis. For instance, losing a job, prolonged illness of a family member, the death of his father. Even reaching a peak of success can actually cause a man to come up empty. The men who have the most severe crises are long-term workaholics. They have been depending on money and status and advancement and success to meet all their needs. They reserved no time for wife, children, friends or even God. Suddenly after 20 years of this harried unbalanced life style they question the value of it all.

King David's writings reveal the classic struggles of a middle-aged man. He wrote in Psalm102:

“My days vanish like smoke... My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass.... In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days.... So I said: «Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days.”

IV. REALITY OF IT: “REASSESSMENT”

Unlike a woman’s time of menopause when she ceases to be able to bear children, a man’s “menopause” is not biological. A woman is confronted with the impact of hormone changes in her body which influence her emotions and every part of her being. However a man has no physical crisis like the menopause of a woman. His is totally emotional and psychological. It is a time when he is looking back over his life and assessing what he has done, what he has believed, and he is doing that because he faces his own mortality. He no longer feels the invincibility of youth—that feeling that death won’t touch him.

He thinks back to the goals he had when he started out, what he wanted to accomplish with his life. What impact he was going to make on life. Now he looks and sees many things unfulfilled. He no longer has the same energy and drive, and he’s not sure he can do what he had dreamed of anymore.

Let’s look at the most common stages of mid-life crisis.



V. MOST COMMON STAGES OF MID-LIFE CRISIS

A. Reality of Death Ps.102:5

“Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones.”

He’ll never get out of this one alive. As he feels the aches and pains, even if they are occasional, and looks in the mirror and suddenly sees his father’s face instead of his own, he begins to face the fact that all those years ahead of him, are no longer so many. He may not live to conquer all the mountains he planned to. Or if he does live long enough he may not have the strength to do it.

He begins to deal with an aging parent, or maybe even the death of his father, and he suddenly realizes when his dad is gone that there is nothing between him and death. He is the next generation to die. You learn more from the death of a parent than from all the academics together. The reality of death and life suddenly confronts us all.

Dealing with the reality of death a man may feel that he is on a plateau.

B. Being on a Plateau

Everything stretches out before him with no more challenges. Alexander the Great wept at age 33 because he had conquered everything. There were no more lands to conquer. Every man faces the fact that either he has already reached his goals or the goals he had are no longer attainable.

If a man is dealing with the reality of death and feels he is on a plateau in life he may also begin to feel he is in a cage.

C. Trapped in a Cage

He begins to feel like he is trapped, this is all there is to life. The complaints against God begin. He has been faithful. He believed if he worked hard everything would turn out just like he planned. But it hasn’t and he feels thwarted. All he sees are responsibilities and they make him feel trapped. This can lead to depression.

D. Feeling of Depression

Like David he can say, "I am weary with groaning." Life has taken on a permanently gray color. His soul fills with self-pity. He is generally unhappy with life. Many times he thinks it is all caused by the other people around him. He starts criticizing his wife because she never looks nice, she's always tired. He blames his kids for rebelling and making his life miserable. Basically he deceives himself into thinking that it is all hopeless because his expectations in life have not come about.

VI. TWO AREAS OF CRISES

There are two areas of life that a man usually experiences a crisis in.

A. Career

Maybe he is "set aside" in his career because there is a younger man who is better, quicker, more educated. Or he just sees that he is never going to make any advancement. Or maybe his job is totally eliminated because of advancing technology. A man's basic identity is wrapped up in his work, his job. If he loses that in any way, or if he is struggling with it, he can easily be thrown into a mid-life crisis. Some men have just given up and sat at home while their wife had to support the family and try to hold things together. They turn to alcoholism, or just become another dependent, losing the desire to try. Sinking into hopelessness. On the other side, if he has been successful in his work, but the advantages of more money and a higher position leave him feeling dry and empty, this may create a sense of not only emptiness, but despair.

B. Marriage

What happens in the marriage of a man who is going through a mid-life crisis? Suddenly he resents being married to that "old" woman. He's tired of her nagging him, making demands on him, so he looks for someone who will appreciate him more. The little secretary who always looks fresh and pretty and thinks everything he does is wonderful. The neighbor lady who always laughs at his jokes instead of saying, "Not that one again." Many affairs have started off with something so simple. It builds a man's ego to be appreciated, even adored, to feel like he is attractive to a young woman. But it is a road to destruction.

C. 5 reasons the "affair" is destructive from the beginning

1. *The cause of an affair is unmet needs, but an affair only treats symptoms*

It brings no relief for the underlying problems.

2. *Instability mixing with instability*

A man who is having an affair with another woman is already unstable in his emotions, in his life, in his marriage. An affair by its very nature is another unstable situation.

3. *A permanent union must have love and commitment*

Any affair starts off with lack of commitment to a spouse, or two spouses and a betrayal of love. It is very difficult to build a sound relationship on the destruction of another relationship.

4. *A man in mid-life is battling with stress*

Now he has just found a way to make his life more stressful with deception and secrets. It further compounds the stress he is already dealing with.

5. *It fosters insecurity and guilt*

The man is searching for escape from all of his problems, but instead he falls into a trap. Now he has to deal with the unfulfilled expectations of another woman, as well as his own emptiness. It produces more conflict and even deeper frustration.



VII. FINDING A SOLUTION

So what hope is there for a man caught up in this tangle of emotions? Remember that this time of turmoil is not permanent. It is a relatively short-term, age-related time of transition which produces intense anxiety, self-doubt, introspections, and agitation. But it is not a permanent trap which will hold you captive. It is more like going through a corridor and emerging on the other side into a bigger and better room. Life **will** return to normal, unless you make some irrevocable mistakes in a desperate attempt to cope. And even then, God is still able. King David fell into a trap in a very successful time of life when he was more valuable at home than on the battlefield, but was very vulnerable because of his inactivity. Because of his sin with Bathsheba and the further sins to cover it up, he did suffer consequences, but look at Psalm 51 to see his attitude of repentance and his restoration to God

A. Treating the symptoms

This is what many men try to do: treat their symptoms. That's why they think if they could look younger, it would make them feel better. But you can do some things that will help ease you through this, it is like taking an aspirin to bring down a fever even though you are taking antibiotics to kill the infection. They are not the permanent solution, but do have therapeutic value.

1. *Exercise*- That's right. Plan a long vigorous walk every day, or play soccer with your son. It will definitely improve your health and lift your spirits.
2. *New challenges*—What can you do that you have never done before? How about helping to plant a church? Teach a Bible club for children? Take a course in something you've always wanted to learn?
3. *Talking*—Talk to a friend about how you feel. Get it out in the open instead of holding it all inside.
4. *Rest*—Make sure you are getting enough rest instead of constantly driving yourself. It gives life a whole new outlook when you can face it refreshed instead of just dragging along.

Okay, these are a few things that will definitely help you get through it, but while you are doing those you need to be treating the cause as well.

B. Treating the cause

Here are the underlying reasons for mid-life crisis.

1. *Ego needs*

A woman's need is love and a man's need is having his ego built. How can you do this by yourself? How can you get your wife to admire you like you wish she did? Well the best way is to meet her needs. Meeting needs is the glue that holds marriage together. She wants romance at 40 like she did at 20 when you were courting her. So, dress up for **her**. Tell her she is beautiful. Do everything you can think of to make her feel she is loved, and you will soon have a wife who can't be with you enough, who can't say enough good about you.

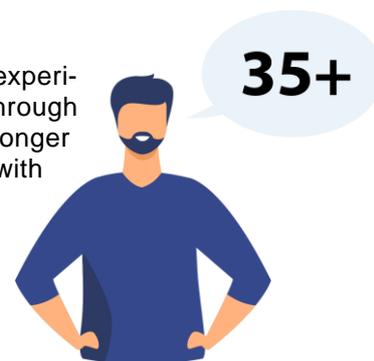
2. *Understanding*

Realize that this is a normal problem in life. You are not the only man who has experienced this. As you look around you, you will begin to observe other men going through the same thing. With understanding your mind becomes an ally. You are no longer battling the thoughts and fears you have, but begin to accept them and deal with them.

You are at the stage in life where you have traded physical for mental strength. When you understand that you have not lost, but gained, then you can begin to look ahead. Your most productive years are just around the corner.

3. *Perspective*

And here we have reached the fundamental cause of a mid-life crisis. It results from what the Bible refers to as "building your house upon the sand." It is possible to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to even be a church leader, and yet still be deeply influenced by the values and attitudes of your surrounding culture. Thus, a young Christian husband and father may become a workaholic, a hoarder of money, a status-seeker, a worshiper of youthfulness, and a lover of pleasure. These tendencies may not reflect his conscious choices and desires: they merely represent the stamp of society's godless values on his life.



Despite his unchristian attitudes, the man may appear to “have it all together” in his first fifteen years as an adult, especially if he is successful in his profession. But he is in considerable danger. Whenever we build our lives on values and principles that contradict the time-honored wisdom of God’s Word, we are laying a foundation on the sand. Sooner or later the storms of life will bring a collapse.

So, if a man’s values are based on a worldly perspective he is more likely to have a severe mid-life crisis. A man does not mourn the loss of his youth if he honestly believes that his life is merely a preparation for a better one to follow. And God does not become the enemy of a man who has walked and talked with Him in daily communion and love. And the relationship between a man and his wife is less strained in the mid-life years if they have protected and maintained their friendship since they were newlyweds.

You will have to examine your perspective on life according to what is actually in the Bible. Just being able to parrot Bible verses or church beliefs will not give you the foundation you need in your life. You have to actually live out those beliefs.

4. Reality of critical spiritual needs

If you are going through a mid-life crisis (or if you want to avoid one!) now is the time to see where you stand spiritually. Is everything you do just because of tradition? Do you spend time in prayer because you know that is a sign of a good Christian, or because you love to be in the presence of your Savior? Do you ever read the Scripture for personal enjoyment, or is it always because you are preparing to preach or teach, or because you know that’s what a good Christian should do? Where is your relationship with God? Do you trust Him with your whole life, not just your eternal salvation? Are you growing closer to Him and more like Him?

C. Final transition

You will know that you have weathered the storm when you have done the following:

1. Accept reality of your own death — It will happen in God’s time. Meanwhile make good use of every single day God gives you.
2. See your wife and God as your ally — They are not there to thwart you but to help you. Reach out to them.
3. Shift your energies and expectations to mental capabilities — This is the time of life to make use of all that experience you have been building up for the past 20 or 30 years.
4. Gain new perspective on the future — Don’t dwell on what you can’t do or haven’t done, look to see what is still out there.
5. Refocus on your personal walk with God — Make this the absolute number one priority in your life.

CONCLUSION

I would like to leave you with two thoughts, no matter what your age is. First of all, life is brief. Moses said in Psalm 90:12, “*Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” Wisdom comes from understanding the temporary nature of this life. Jesus referred to the rich man who thought he had years to live as a fool. We would also be foolish to assume that things will always be as they are or that eternal matters can be dealt with later. All of us know that we will someday hear, “This night your soul shall be required of you.” (Lk. 12:20) We need to live our lives accordingly.

And once you have seriously considered that, keep before you always that the only **true** source of meaning in life is found in love for God and His son Jesus Christ, and in love for mankind, beginning with your own family. Compared to this fundamental system of values, everything else is puny and insignificant. That means your life won’t be destroyed if you don’t become a director or a church superintendent. If you don’t get a better job, or move into a nicer apartment. All of those are temporary things. Focus on the eternal and the future will only become brighter.

Let us help our students, pastors and elders turn their crisis into victories for Jesus. Jesus can make them successful spiritual leaders for the lost sheep. In the Old Testament the mightiest battles were won. The greatest giants came tumbling down. Look at Moses, look at Joshua. These were not young men! They were trained and seasoned by God Himself to bring victory.

A mid-life crisis turned into a mid-life spiritual victory. I am smiling already. Let us clap together in spiritual anticipation.

Amen, amen, amen.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

- Use the following list to evaluate your life. Spend a half a day or a whole day in prayer over these issues, then think about some practical ways that you can prepare for them or conquer them in your life. Share these with your wife.
1. Accept reality of your own death — It will happen in God's time. Meanwhile make good use of every single day God gives you.
 2. See your wife and God as your ally — They are not there to thwart you but to help you. Reach out to them.
 3. Shift your energies and expectations to mental capabilities — This is the time of life to make use of all that experience you have been building up for the past 20 or 30 years.
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