

MIDLIFE CRISIS: A REVIEW AND SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

As a pastor in the United States, I had what I thought was an unusual experience. A mother of a 14-year old, mature-looking girl came to me one Sunday evening and showed me a note her daughter had brought home from church that morning. The note, which I still have as a reminder of how satanic temptation can delude us all, was brief and scribbled on the back of an offering envelope. The note contained these words: “I’m not interested in a long-term relationship. I’m only interested in sex.” That person was a deacon who was right around forty years of age who had two children only slightly younger than the girl who received the note from him. I wondered what was going on in his heart and mind that would cause him to do such a thing. That was in 1972 or 1973.

Similarly, I know a woman who sold some property, announced to her husband she was leaving him and her teenage son, and started her own business. This all happened without any warning. She was right around 40 years of age. It happened in 1998 here in Seoul. I wondered what was going on in her heart and mind. What causes people to do such unexpected things?

In between those two events, I discovered a book that helped to explain what was happening. In *Passages* (1974), Gail Sheehy presented a description of a variety of passages, also identified as crises, that persons experience as they go throughout life. In that book, she used the term “midlife crisis.” If she did not originate the term, she certainly popularized it. Almost immediately, her views were assailed by those in the counseling field. Particularly, they attacked the idea of a midlife crisis being typical of all adults. They indicated that the midlife crisis was not a generally observable phenomenon. Rather, it was more

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of a white, middle class (male?) experience; and not all persons in that group had the experience.

The idea of a midlife change was not new. Carl Jung was a strong advocate of a change-point that occurred in the middle of life. Also, Daniel Levinson, a disciple of Jung, had written about such an idea. Just four years after Sheehy's *Passages*, his book written in collaboration with several others, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (1978), presented life transitions similar in nature to her passages, or crises. Levinson offered evidence of a period of transition in middle adulthood around the age of 40 to 45. This time of transition was a time of great stress precipitated by a number of factors.

There have been a number of studies since that time that support either the view that there is a midlife crisis or the view that there is no midlife crisis. I will discuss briefly the findings of the two opposing views, present some general characteristics of adults entering middle adulthood, and then offer some ways that the church might minister to people in this age group.

TWO VIEWS ABOUT THE MIDLIFE CRISIS

There are many who have stated without equivocation that there is no such thing as a midlife crisis. Primarily, they are reacting against the idea that it is a **universal** reality for those entering middle adulthood. They argue that only a small percentage of people actually go through what might be described as a midlife crisis, although they would not use that term because of its connection to the popularized view. They prefer to use some more bland characterization of this experience. Since they believe it only affects about 10% of the adult population, it cannot be described as a stage through which all persons must pass. Interestingly, these same persons refer to Daniel Levinson when speaking of the midlife crisis as universal. Yet, even Levinson did not consider it universal but affecting only about 80% of his study group:

But for the great majority of men—about 80 percent of our subjects—this period evokes tumultuous struggles within the self and with the external world. Their time of Mid-life Transition is a time of moderate or severe crisis. Every aspect of their lives comes into question, and they are horrified by much that is revealed. They are full of recriminations against themselves and

others. They cannot go on as before, but need time to choose a new path or modify the old one.¹

Thus, he states very clearly that only 80% of men have any kind of crisis, with some being worse than others. Also, he stated that the other 20% seemed to have very little stress. As we shall see, these statistics may be higher than those produced by studies in the following decade, but they are not radically different in conclusion. What Levinson does conclude is that all persons go through a life review.

Some researchers say that those most likely to experience a midlife crisis would be the upper class—those who have time to think about what they have accomplished in life. Other researchers believe it is more likely to affect professionals and caregivers—typically the upper-middle class. These are persons who are most likely to experience burnout from working closely with the public. Also, they are more likely to wonder if their life-choice is actually accomplishing what they had expected when they entered it. Thus, they are more likely to re-evaluate their choice of profession and reconsider their career. Still other researchers say it is more likely to affect only the middle class. After all, they are the ones who have discovered that their dream, their vision of what they would accomplish in life, is not going to be realized. Thus, they experience the frustration of not achieving their dream and face a re-evaluation of what they actually might be able to accomplish in life. Still other researchers say it is more likely to affect the lower class. They have little opportunity to reach any of their life goals; and, thus, they experience serious reflection upon the value of their lives. Interestingly, other researchers point out the exact opposite to the above-stated various findings and give reasons for their not being true. Which are we to believe? Do the researchers have something to prove, some hidden agenda that distorts their findings? Are they really trying to discover the truth? What is happening? Is there any solution to these different views?

Two ladies authored developmental textbooks in 1994. Interestingly, one denies the validity of the midlife crisis, while the other seems to accept it, albeit with reservations. In *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, Kathleen Berger takes the latter view. In *Lifespan Development*, Helen Bee takes the former. Comparison of

¹Daniel J. Levinson and others, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 199.

their two approaches can shed light on how they might come to widely divergent views.

Evidence for the Midlife Crisis

Berger talks about the “perceptual shift” that occurs as an adult grows older and as parents, family members, or friends begin to die. This shift causes one to see himself or herself as a mortal being no longer immune to the reality of death. She reminds us that middle adults also typically face adolescent children in the home—children who soon will be leaving the home to establish their own. Further, she relates that vocational options are becoming more and more limited. With circumstances such as these bombarding the mind and emotions, the typical adult may struggle to maintain balance.² At the same time, she presents the idea that the number of folk experiencing a crisis at this time is limited, not universal. She does not believe that all persons experience a crisis situation from the life assessment, although some do. Rather, many use the assessment “to reaffirm the overall rightness of one’s present course and to look for ways to make minor adjustments to it.”³ She presents some of Levinson’s arguments for the crisis being the experience of a majority of men. Then, she refers to research done by Michael P. Farrell and Stanley D. Rosenberg three years after his work. Their research discovered that only 12% of persons (especially men) had “an obvious, classic midlife crisis, openly wrestling with feelings that their life was goalless and empty . . . and wishing they could start over afresh.” In this same study, they discovered that another 30% were experiencing “even greater dissatisfaction, but rather than questioning their own life choices and trying to make changes,” they blamed circumstances or other people. A third group, 26%, “tended to deny that anything was generally wrong with their lives, but they had many specific complaints that could well have been caused by their inability to cope with psychological difficulties. Only 32% “seemed completely crisis free, satisfied with their work, their marriages, their children, and their health.”⁴ Apparently, 68% of adult men can be said to experience

²Kathleen Stassen Berger, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1004), 560.

³*Ibid.*, 561.

⁴*Ibid.*, 561-62.

some type of crisis in this study, whereas slightly less than one-third conclude any life assessment with a sense of satisfaction.

This study would tend to support Levinson's view that the midlife crisis is commonplace among adult men, but it tends to disprove the universality of the midlife crisis. Men who experience the midlife crisis may react in different ways:

. . . men's responses to midlife depended largely upon their personal style of coping with problems. Interestingly, education and socioeconomic status seemed to affect coping style. Those who were relatively affluent and well educated were more likely either to have a crisis or cope effectively; those with less education and lower SES [social economic status] were likely either to blame others or to "punish" themselves psychosomatically.⁵

Berger also mentioned that women were of previous generations were more likely to experience a midlife crisis—evidently because of the fact that most women remained in the home while rearing children and that their departure led to reconsideration of life-goals and purpose. However, in the present generation, women who do experience midlife crises are likely to do so in the following way: "Unmarried women without children . . . or married women without jobs . . . are more likely to experience them than women who have combined both roles."⁶ In the light of the experiences of both sexes presented in her discussion, she concludes that a midlife crisis is a reality "for some people, some of the time, in certain contexts."⁷ It is interesting that she mentions the common nature of the psychological struggles in midlife but concludes only a few actually have a midlife crisis. I suspect that she gives evidence to support what she believes but that she is afraid to take a stand that is not common or popular among her peers.

Lack of Evidence for a Midlife Crisis

On the other hand, Bee takes the view that there is no such thing as a midlife crisis. She refers to Jung and Levinson and quickly disposes of their credibility by referring to an evaluation of much research done up to about 1989. Interestingly, she quotes two research evaluators in the same paragraph: The first is David Chiriboga who, upon review of

⁵Ibid., 562.

⁶Ibid., 564.

⁷Ibid., 565.

all the available data, is certain that only between 2% and 5% of middle adults actually experience “serious midlife problems.” The second person is Lois Tamir who, upon “reading the same evidence,” concludes that middle adulthood is “a time of important psychological transition marked with ‘deep-seated self-doubts or confusion.’”⁸ The interesting thing is that she presents two views of the same research in which both persons appear to present opposite conclusions. A close analysis of what they say, however, reveals that both possibly have similar views. Chiriboga can identify the affected group as being minute because of his restrictive modifier “serious.” Tamir, on the other hand, looks at the middle adult group as a whole and can say that it is a problem time because she does not restrict the problems experienced by this group to “serious.” These findings in no way dispute the findings of Farrell and Rosenberg in Berger’s above-mentioned citation. Reduced to a simplistic assessment, what appears to be going on here is a matter of semantics. One group, the overwhelming majority of researchers and analysts, does not want to concede that midlife, at least at or near the point of entry, can be characterized as a time of struggle. They minimize the struggle. The other group looks at the group and sees the struggle and does not choke on the phrase, midlife crisis. Advocates of this view see the problem as a problem and do not worry about the misleading terminology or the excessive views of early advocates. Nevertheless, after presenting these two assessments by Chiriboga and Tamir, Bee states very emphatically in the next paragraph that her sympathy lies with Chiriboga. She quotes a few other studies, the last referring to the possibility of one specific group [“white men from the middle class, especially those with professional occupations”] being more likely to experience a midlife crisis than any other group. Then, she concludes her discussion of the possibility of any midlife crisis in this revealing statement:

But even if this result were common in a number of cohorts, it would not begin to persuade me that a crisis is necessary, or even a very common, experience of the middle years of adulthood. Certainly there are stresses and tasks that are unique to this period, but there is little sign that these stresses and tasks are more likely to overwhelm an adult’s coping resources at this age than at any other.⁹

380. ⁸Helen Bee, *Lifespan Development* (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994),

⁹*Ibid.*, 381.

Her mind is made up, and there will be no changing it, regardless of studies that may take an opposing view. However, there appears to be a redeeming aspect in her last sentence that qualifies her absolute rejection of the midlife crisis. I believe that her assessment of the situation of middle adulthood is not a rejection of the reality of problems that are faced, or even with the life assessment itself, but with the term “midlife crisis.” Her actual conclusion is not that different from Berger’s conclusion, although they arrive there by roads converging from opposite directions.

From these writers, it seems that one of the major problems is with the designation of this experience as a “midlife crisis.” I would prefer to call it a “midlife assessment,” rather than a crisis. I believe that every person comes to middle adulthood and faces some kind of assessment of the first half of life. The crisis sets in when the person entering middle adulthood does not handle the aging experience well. Aging cannot be avoided if a person lives a typical life of threescore and ten, or seventy years. It is how one reacts to the aging process that determines whether it becomes a crisis. From the studies cited in Berger and Bee, we can see that a majority of people do not handle the assessment in a positive way, even though they would not designate the typical response as a midlife crisis.

At this point, I want us to think about the assessment of middle adulthood from a Christian perspective, rather than a more clinical perspective as with Berger and Bee. Charles Sell indicates that the person in middle adulthood is “neither young nor old” but rather is “at the point where the past and future close in,” with the past calling for “reevaluation” and the future demanding “restructuring.”¹⁰ It is a time in which middle adults assess who they are, what they had hoped to be, and what made the difference in the two. Interestingly, if they have succeeded in becoming what they had hoped to be, they wonder if the price paid was worth it or if they had set goals that were too low. Those who have failed to become what they had hoped to be wonder if they have under-achieved or if life has been unfair to them. Either way, they face emotional turmoil as they reevaluate the first half of their lives. During this review, many persons consider “how much of their life has been determined by the inner self and how much it has been shaped by

¹⁰Charles M. Sell, *Transitions Through Adult Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 127.

conformity to the world around.”¹¹ In effect, they are asking whether they have done what they wanted to do or been compliant with the demands and expectations of others.

While some researchers say that the midlife is the most stable time of life, others say it is a time of crisis. Sell asks some relevant questions for Christians to consider:

Is midlife so great? Is it a curse or a chance? Is it a time to cut loose or to settle down? Are the inner yearnings God’s call or the flesh’s temptation? How should the Christian respond to midlife turmoil –if it comes?

The evangelical cannot respond to midlife with the gusto of many of our contemporaries. Scripture does not permit us to place such confidence in those inward voices. We have a Word from outside ourselves to guide our lives. It, not self, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Those who cut themselves loose from the authority of Scripture are quick to reach for authority in the self. Those who do so in the name of Christianity are not too convincing when they try to undergird it theologically. Evangelicals believe that Scripture commands conformity to Jesus Christ.¹²

Christians dare not give way to the temptation to throw away everything (including the wife and children) that was a part of the first half of their lives and start all over. They must be careful when listening to an inner voice, which may be merely repeating the tempting words of Satan. Instead, they must be certain they are listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. To desert one’s family and one’s responsibilities is never appropriate for a Christian. On the other hand, it is always appropriate to recommit to becoming more like Jesus. This is, after all, the defining commitment of the middle adult years. Christians should always seek to do the will of God, not the will of their momentary passions or whims. Sell indicates that a midlife change may be positive, even though “drastic.” It may lead a Christian couple to leave home and friends to go overseas as missionaries to a different country or in a different cultural setting. The midlife change may lead to a smaller change, such as participating in volunteer ministries in the local church or community setting.¹³ Change may be positive as one heeds the call of God to commit one’s life to Him. Change may be destructive as one listens to self-centered voices that call from deep within the carnal nature that is a part of the human condition.

¹¹Ibid., 129.

¹²Ibid., 130-31.

¹³Ibid., 132.

Thus, it would be appropriate to examine some of the characteristics of middle adulthood to further the understanding of what one might expect upon reaching this age (generally considered to be from around 35 or 40 to 60 or 65 years of age). I will use a more specific age group for middle adulthood as being 40-60, the traditional age-grouping. I recognize that middle adulthood may be lengthening as life expectancy becomes longer. Middle adulthood will likely be stretched to include the years through 65, especially when the age of retirement becomes 70. On the other hand, I do not accept Sheehy's modified view, in *New Passages* (1995), that middle adulthood begins as late as the fifties for the present generation of Baby Boomers, or Boomers (the post World War II generation of babies). A careful reading of her first book would indicate the weakness of her own argument for changing the time of entry into middle adulthood. Her description (in her most recent book) of the Boomers as not entering middle adulthood until they hit their fifties fits her description (in her earlier book) of what happens when a person tries to postpone entering midlife.¹⁴ This delay has dramatic effects, mostly negative. The problem is that the Boomers are presently moving through this period and the effects of the delayed entry are not yet fully evident. From a Christian perspective, it appears that the effects will be similar to what she described in her earlier book. Further, the delayed entry will mean a shortened middle adulthood, not a lengthening of life. Thus, the age often considered most fulfilling will be shortened; and life ultimately may be judged less positively.

Let us examine the characteristics of middle adulthood to see why this assessment may be true.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

Perhaps it would be helpful to consider some of the characteristics of middle adulthood. Then, I would like to present some of the characteristics of those who experience a crisis resulting from the assessment experience. Finally, I will present a biblical example of one who had this kind of crisis experience.

¹⁴Compare Gail Sheehy, *New Passages: Mapping Your Life across Time* (New York: Random House, 1995), 57-66, with Gail Sheehy, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 285-96.

Characteristics of Middle Adulthood

The physical skills in the middle adulthood years are, generally speaking, in a state of slow decline. Eyesight declines noticeably, and hearing loss follows. Glasses become commonplace in the early years, whereas hearing aids become more common in the later years. Performance of repeated skills, such as work-related activities, remains fairly stable in the early years. Physical activities that require speed and agility are becoming less gratifying and more challenging. Only the rarest of athletes retains the ability to continue at a high level into middle adulthood. Phenomenal athletes such as Nolan Ryan and Michael Jordan may inspire us, but they cannot reinvigorate us. Even golf legends such as Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus move from the PGA tours into the Senior PGA tours in the early part of middle adulthood. They cannot compete with others who are younger, much less their early selves. More mature persons who think they are as young as they feel are bound to experience many aches and pains before they admit they are as old as they are. Problems with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and being overweight can lead to heart disease, strokes, and related problems. Smoking, low levels of exercise, and poor diet can increase the chances of having cancer, even for those who have no family history of cancer.¹⁵

The mental skills are also showing a slow decline in ability. IQ remains at peak performance through the first part of middle adulthood but begins to decline in the latter part. Memory remains strong (although a little slowed by age) but begins to decline noticeably in the latter part of middle adulthood. The depths of the understanding and the years of experience tend to offset the loss of mental agility, however.

On the other hand, the emotional skills should be improving as one gains greater control of emotions. Persons learn that lack of emotional control can multiply one's work and one's sorrow. One no longer strongly feels the need to be defensive, to hide the inner person, and no longer wastes time and energy trying to hide from what others think or feel. Learned self-control has great advantages as one ages.

The relational skills are tested by both children and parents. Children are typically entering the adolescent years, the terrible teens. They tend to challenge nearly everything the middle adult parents value.

¹⁵Bee, 377.

They resist, they resent, they mock, they insult, and on and on it goes. Parents face difficulty in trying to find a middle ground to engage and encourage their nearly grown children without alienating them completely. At the same time, many of these adults have parents who are aging into the senior adult years—some of whom will require emotional support as well as financial support. The relational demands can be nearly unbearable at times.

Maybe because of the relational needs (and numerous other reasons), the spiritual life in middle adulthood is often characterized by a deeper relationship with God. There is no longer the compelling need to outperform others or to make a fortune—goals that dominated early adulthood. Thus, adults are finally at the place in life where they begin to emphasize more important things. Perhaps those important things are discovered/rediscovered in the life assessment that takes place during the early part of middle adulthood. Christian adults seek to deepen their faith, to understand it better, to live it more fully—i.e., to become more like Jesus.

Persons who go through the midlife assessment may find greater meaning in life. However, some persons panic; and the midlife assessment turns into a midlife crisis.

Characteristics of a Midlife Crisis

The characteristics of the midlife crisis are well documented in numerous studies. Levinson identifies the following characteristics. Man will go through a life review, an assessment of the first forty years, in an effort to bring to some kind of conclusion the first half of life. This assessment may be dealt with positively and without much notice by others, or it may lead to much struggle and radical change that is apparent to all. Man will typically begin to consider his own mortality—this usually being triggered by a life-threatening illness or by the death of some important individual. He may decide that his career has not been very fulfilling and choose to launch out on a completely different career. He may decide after much struggle that it would be better to stay with the present career, although unfulfilling, and find fulfillment in some other way. It is the choice of the source of fulfillment that may cause serious complications for himself and for family members. He may choose to find fulfillment in his family relationships or in establishing new relationships—i.e., an affair, or

even a divorce. He may choose to find fulfillment in some new activity, such as tennis, golf, mountain climbing, collecting stamps, volunteer services. He will wrestle with four polarities: (1) facing the fact that he is no longer young while accepting the fact that old age is nearer than childhood, (2) a growing awareness of the destructive choices and influences that led him to what he now is while trying to recreate himself according to his own values and choices, (3) determining how to express his masculine self and the emerging feminine side of himself, and (4) the need for attachment while also needing separateness.¹⁶ All of these basic actions and struggles cause serious action and reaction within the person. Some persons waver between one choice and another. Some talk to their friends, and their friends often become weary of listening to their unstable thought patterns.

Sheehy's description is very graphic, "Turning backward, going around in circles, feeling lost in a buzz of confusion and unable to make decisions—all this is predictable and, for many people, a necessary precursor to making the passage into midlife."¹⁷ The midlife crisis is a predictable time of confusion and uncertainty. It is also a time of fear and dread. It is a time when persons need to draw closer to God, not just closer to the inner self. It is a time when one needs to pay close attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit, for the Bible does warn about this problem.

A Biblical Example of a Midlife Crisis

In his early life, David was a shepherd. This skill trained him for his later experiences. He needed patience to endure the years King Saul pursued him with murderous intention. On at least two occasions, he had opportunity to kill Saul; but he refused to harm him each time out of respect for the position Saul held. After Saul's death, David became king at the age of thirty. He went through the first dozen years or so consolidating the kingdom and winning the hearts of the people. Then, something very unusual happened to this gentle man. It was the time of year "when kings go off to war," but David sent his troops off to battle while remaining behind (see 2 Samuel 11:1). The rest of the chapter records a sordid account of a man in a midlife crisis. He did not have the energy or desire to go out with his forces. He could not sleep at

¹⁶Levinson and others, 191-200.

¹⁷Sheehy, *New Passages*, 63.

night. He was restless. From his housetop, he saw Bathsheba, desired her, and sent a messenger to find out who she was. Had he become bored with his wives? Was there not one who stirred his passion? Had they become too familiar? Whatever the truth may have been, we will never know. Upon learning that she was the wife of one of his valiant soldiers, David sent for her anyway and had an adulterous meeting with her. How old was he at this time? If we can trust the approximate dating contained in my Thompson Chain Reference Bible, it was thirteen years after he became king when this event happened. That means he was forty-three years old—right in the middle of the time for the midlife assessment. Because he did not handle this assessment in a positive way, it became a midlife crisis; and this crisis affected every area and every day of his life until his death. It cost him his self-respect, his peaceful relationships with his family, and his kingship (although only briefly). He could never forget what he had done; for he wrote, “My sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:3).

What a tragedy that so great a man could fall so low and experience a midlife crisis! Certainly, the example of David serves as a warning to us all that what should be a positive experience can turn into a crisis if not handled properly in the light of God’s love and God’s will for our lives. We need to be careful to understand the danger of the life assessment to insure that it does not become a crisis in our lives. Many Christians, not just those ensnared and enslaved by Satan, have been caught up in the midlife crisis. Thus, there is a great need for the church to minister to adults entering middle adulthood.

MINISTRY TO ADULTS ENTERING MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

Because even “a man after God’s own heart” (see 1 Samuel 13:14) can fall into sin, we must learn for our own benefit, as well as alert others about, the dangers and pitfalls of life. There are certain duties and pressures that all healthy middle adults face. These can be key entry points for ministry.

Robert Havighurst has listed seven developmental tasks that are appropriate for middle adults. He believes that these tasks “arise from changes within the organism, from environmental pressures, and above all from demands or obligations laid upon the individual by his own

values and aspirations.”¹⁸ He lists these seven tasks. (1) Assisting teen-age children to become responsible and happy adults, (2) Achieving adult social and civic responsibility, (3) Reaching and maintaining satisfactory performance in one’s occupational career, (4) Developing adult leisure-time activities, (5) Relating oneself to one’s spouse as a person, (6) To accept and adjust to the physiological changes of middle age; and (7) Adjusting to aging parents.¹⁹ Most of these tasks would be applicable in developed countries. However, in countries where war, famine, or poverty is dominant, numbers three and four would not likely be relevant. Neither would they likely be important to persons who are living in poverty in any culture. As in the United States, middle adults confront these tasks in Korea. There will always be developmental tasks that confront persons at every age, assuming they are in good health. If health becomes an issue, it may complicate other adult tasks.

Thus, the church must be aware of the life circumstances of its constituency. What do middle adults need? What are their concerns? What burdens do they face? What tasks do they face? What potential crises may distract, discomfit, and derail them from accomplishing the ordinary tasks of life? The church must seek to answer such questions. If the church is serious in its belief that Christians are to become more like Jesus, then it will provide ministry to adults that will encourage them and enable them to overcome in the midst of difficult circumstances. To be like Jesus Christ requires one not to give up, not to be dissuaded from one’s goal, not to compromise with the world and its ungodly thinking, not to give in to one’s lower nature. Christians must never allow career to take precedence over relationship, whether that relationship be with God or family. Christians must never allow success to affect their humility before God and others. Christians must never allow their failures to make them ashamed to have relationship with God or others.

Although the church emphasizes ministry to children, to youth, and to senior adults, the age group that receives little or no emphasis is the one that is most important to the life of the church **in the present**. Daniel Aleshire writes, “Adulthood does not guarantee a mature faith, but it can provide the seasoning, the curing, the fermenting that leads to

¹⁸Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education*, 3d ed., newly revised New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972), 95.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 96-106.

an integrated and congruent way of being Christian in the world.”²⁰ Simply stated, adults may be immature in belief and action. Thus, the church needs to train middle adults in the areas of Christian theology, Christian ethics, and Christian morality. The church should train God’s people concerning the coming problems of every age in life. Middle adults should not be left out. However, the church should not wait until adults reach the middle years. Rather the church needs to plan and implement a program that prepares young adults approaching middle age for the life assessment, the trials, and the burdens of the coming middle adult years. There is a saying that applies here: “To be forewarned is to be forearmed!” The church must give warning and assistance in preparing young adults for the dangers and pitfalls of middle adulthood so that they will be armed ahead of time for the battle to come. Such training will not guarantee victory, but it will make victory more likely. The church needs to take away one of Satan’s most effective tools: surprise.

Pastors need to preach about life issues that will forearm the people of God. Christian educators must formulate programs, retreats, and study groups to enhance the strengths of the people of God. Christian counselors must be involved in preparing the people of God for the predictable passages, or transitions, of life. The people of God must learn that they are involved in a war; and the enemy, Satan, is determined to destroy them every step of the way. He knows every time of weakness and will come again and again when it is a convenient time to trick, trap, and triumph over us. The church must not ignore any age group in its emphasis upon the Christian journey—not even middle adults. They need to know that the church cares for them also and that the church will not allow them to drift casually along with the world.

²⁰Daniel O. Aleshire, *Faithcare: Ministering to All God’s People Through the Ages of Life* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 169.