
Middle age – from a mother’s perspective

Having just turned 50, I hadn’t given much thought to where in the spectrum of life I lay. My body had definitely made it clear to me that I was no longer a teenager, or even a young adult for that matter, but as for that mature and regal sounding label of ‘middle age’? Nah... surely I was nowhere near that yet! However, after someone near and dear to me suggested that perhaps I might indeed be in that very state, I looked it up. According to britannica.com, middle age is: “the period of human adulthood (*ok, I can deal with that*) that immediately precedes the onset of **old age** (*say that again? Well, that’s definitely not me then! Phew!*) Britannica continues: “Though the age period that defines middle age is somewhat arbitrary, differing greatly from person to person, it is generally defined as being between the ages of **40** and **60**.” After picking my jaw up off the floor, I had to come to the realisation that, at least according to whoever publishes Britannica, I am indeed very much middle age. Maybe I should suggest the definition be changed to ‘that period of your life when you see or hear the term ‘middle age’ and flatly deny that you could be anywhere near it.’

Different for different people

So, if roughly between 40 and 60 is the accepted age at which middle age happens, what then does it look like for most people? I am writing this article from the perspective of a wife and parent of 2 children so I cannot really speak for those who are single or without children. However, if you *are* in a family situation, you could have adult children starting to leave home and create homes of their own, or, like others my age, you could have a handful of grandchildren already. Perhaps you could even have younger children still in primary school and with all that other joy ahead of you. As for your work situation, you could be juggling full-time work with running children here and there, or baby-sitting the grandkids. You may be close to giving up work, or may not have worked for many years. You may even be thinking of starting something completely new and doing some study in amongst the family responsibilities. You are most likely at the stage where you are caring for elderly parents. Clearly it is very different for different people.

So, I tried to think of what might be some common elements somewhere amid all the chaos that is life as: ‘**an adult not exactly young anymore**’.

A shift in perspective

For 25 years now my life has revolved around the needs of our kids. In a way, it has defined me. No matter that I was involved in many ecclesial and school committees and had part time work of my own, essentially my focus has been the physical, emotional and spiritual care of our children. I’ve worried relentlessly about them, celebrated their achievements and helped them navigate the roller-coaster of adolescence. Now that focus has been forced to shift. With one having left to establish a home of her own and another soon to do the same, I find myself mourning in a way, realising we are now onlookers, supporters from a distance, no longer the centre of their lives. Of course, they were never truly our own... they have been a precious and priceless gift from God, who gave us the privilege and serious responsibility of bringing them to adulthood and where possible to Christ. I have no doubt that there is plenty more for us to do to help and support them in the years to come and hope they will always feel a sense of home and belonging with us whenever they want.

But... what of us now? These last few months, my husband and I have had a few times when we’ve been on our own again, trying to adjust to not cooking for 4, looking at each other for inspiration

as to how to occupy our day. Our love has definitely changed and evolved over the years, ranging back and forth from deep love and adoration to occasionally bordering on mere tolerance! As we enter middle age we have definitely developed a much deeper appreciation of each others company and love, based on our experiences and time to grow together. We are entering a new phase and it's definitely a time for reflection.

A time for reflection on past experiences

It's easy to forget a lot of what's happened in the last 50 years, but one thing is sure, we have faced our share of troubles. Most people reaching middle age could say they have been through many good times, but also many sad or distressing times. Our health has been compromised on several occasions, we have lost loved ones, worried and fretted for other family and friends who have suffered, and relationships have been tried, tested and challenged. We have learnt the hard way about our mental health and had the courage to seek help and treatment where necessary.

One thing that has been a constant in my spiritual and physical journey through these challenges is that I have always tried to keep a line of communication open with God my Father. While I may not have specific prayer times or methods, I find I have always discussed my everyday concerns and pastimes with Him at any and all times of the day and night- knowing He is always there to listen. Any mundane day to day activity can include 'chatting' or 'conversing' with God and I certainly hope He doesn't mind the often jumbled and nonsensical ramblings in my mind. It is a blessing to know that Jesus is there mediating for us and making sure God hears what we truly need Him to hear. Just knowing He hears and has had such an impact on my life in the past really helps.

As Phil 4v6 says

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

God guides our life

This process of reflection certainly reveals one enormous truth... [God guides our lives in ways we cannot always tell](#). No matter the pains we may go through and the sometimes long stretches of sorrow or trouble, [God always makes a way](#). We have come through, our children are coming through, and we have all as a family seen how the hand of God works in our lives. I can truly say that God has given me some hard and painful lessons... series of events have unfolded that couldn't possibly be by coincidence and sometimes I have received very specific and detailed answers to my prayers... not always what I had asked for or hoped. The biggest lesson I have learned is to give my life over to Him totally. Instead of asking for specific outcomes, I ask for courage, strength and wisdom to deal with what life brings which isn't always pretty. This is answered prayer in all its rawness and beauty. My wish is to be a role model and someone my family can look to for comfort and reassurance that God is with us, just like I can look to my wonderful 97yr old father who still has faith as strong as the day he was baptised so long ago, who is the essence of love and tolerance and courtesy, who appreciates everything that has happened in his long and eventful life as a blessing from God.

What does all this mean now? Well, surely, since [God tests and tries those He loves](#) in order to refine and strengthen them, we should now be in an ideal position to help others. We may not feel very wise, or like we know all the answers – basically because we don't; but I'm sure we have plenty to offer in the way of comfort and support to others going through tough times. We can look outside ourselves and seek opportunities to reach out, get to know our brothers and sisters

and [look for ways to help](#). I feel this is one way of filling the holes left by the natural transition of our family. Having perhaps done many of the roles better suited to younger and fitter adults, like teaching Sunday School, hosting youth activities, fund raising and volunteering etc, it's time to look for what else we can do in service to our Lord.

Realising we still have much to learn

One thing I was definitely hoping would improve as I got older and wiser was the ability to focus my mind quietly on scriptural talks and readings. For so long my mind has been a whirlwind of plans and worries and what comes next. The ability to focus on the words of a prayer being given on our behalf, or the words of a hymn, or a Bible study has, to say the least, been virtually impossible. I totally understand what the apostle Paul was talking about when he lamented on his inability to do what he knew he should do when his mind just wanted to go totally somewhere else. Old habits are hard to break and there is no option but to pray to our merciful God. There is no doubt that I love Him and acknowledge everything He has done for us, but I still struggle with my human nature... making God's word a daily part of our lives is more important than ever. For a time, we had a lovely routine of reading the Bible together as a family every night. Now that is rare and often impossible. So, the onus is back on us as individuals to find the time. Maybe as we get closer to old age and retirement this will become more attainable. Maybe not. Thanks to God that he is so merciful and loving. As I said before, we will never know all the answers to life's questions, we will keep learning and making mistakes until the day Christ returns.

We are in a unique position

When you think about it, middle age must be called that for a reason. We are definitely not young and sprightly with all our plans and dreams ahead of us. But neither are we yet limited by ageing bodies and minds that inevitably will one day restrict our actions and thoughts. Perhaps, as far as God is concerned, we are actually at the peak of our capacity to serve. It's a sobering thought, especially when we are feeling tired and sometimes overwhelmed by all life has thrown at us. Our unique position is that we can support both the younger and the older generations of our ecclesial family. We are in a better place to focus on preaching, both to our youth and to the community around us. As Psalm 71 v 17 says;

“since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.
¹⁸Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.”

Having done all we can to bring our own children to the knowledge of the truth, there is much we can do to support all the youth in our ecclesia, by taking an interest in their lives and being someone they can approach and seek advice from. On the other hand, we are still more than capable of assisting the elderly and needy in our ecclesias, whether financially, spiritually or physically. It all makes us sound like superheroes doesn't it?

Opportunities to serve

As for my husband and I, sometime soon, we hope to travel, and explore areas of God's world we haven't seen. We'd like to feel unhindered by responsibilities and commitments for a while and just get away. However, wherever we are, whether taking care of grandchildren, standing in the foyer of our church, or brushing our teeth with strangers in a caravan park amenities block, we can still find opportunities to serve, to look outward and not always inward. I don't feel we have

'earned' a break from service and preaching, I don't feel we can be justified in just waiting out our time until Christ comes, thinking we have done enough. However, I do pray that my mind may become clearer and therefore better able to balance my expanding family, my final years of work, time with my patient husband who has endured playing second fiddle to the kids for so much of our married life, and finally, giving what I can back to God after Him having given us so much. Amen.

(Name withheld on request.)
