

Managing the Realities of Midlife

In short: Life happens! And, in the midst of it, so does midlife!

Moving into the middle years can cause confusion, loss of focus, physical slow-downs and transitions, a time of questioning faith, breakdown of relationships and much more.

The transition called midlife happens to everyone, but it doesn't start at the same time for everyone. Some move into midlife in their 40s others in their 50s. Women often connect midlife with menopause. For men, moving into midlife seems to have more to do with inevitable physical decline and the realization that certain treasured goals will not be reached.

For some, midlife is a crisis, but for most, it's a muddle—an unsettling with the mundane—as they sit on the same couch, watching the same television program, on the same night, with the same person, in the same room, just before they trudge off to the same bed.

Whether crisis or muddle, midlife is a time of change. It becomes a cross point—a choice point—for everyone. They can set the stage for streamlining their lives, narrowing into emptiness. Or they can renew and re-value themselves, their homes and their relationships with options for new growth and new possibilities for new life.

In Jesus, God offers the “abundant life” (John 10:10)—to people of all ages! Midlife does not bring a time when people stop learning or growing. People in midlife do not need to deteriorate mentally and physically or settle into an empty passing of days that lasts from the fiftieth year until death. God holds people to the task of imitating Christ throughout their entire lives.

Ways to help

Here are some ways to help those who are in the muddle or crisis of midlife:

- Maintain groups for men and women that are alive and busy with learning and service. Contact Lutheran Men in Mission (Doug Haugen, 800/638-3522, ext. 2566) or Women of the ELCA (800/638-3522, ext. 2730) for assistance.
- Organize Bible study groups for people at midlife. Their time together will allow them to share experiences and offer support for each other. Small groups devoted to addressing specific issues, such as menopause, may be helpful, too.
- Offer marriage renewal retreats specifically aimed at those who have been married 15 years or longer. Encourage sharing and recommitment as a part of the retreat.
- Provide devotional and other resources that mid-lifers can read and discuss. Go to www.augsburgfortress.org and browse the resources under “Spirituality” or “Adult Faith Formation.” Two titles you might consider adding to your church library: *Soul Maps: A Guide to the Midlife Spirit*, by Mardi Tindal (Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648; ISBN 0-8066-4451-6; \$11.99 plus shipping) and *Embracing Midlife: Congregations as Support Systems* (Alban Institute, 800/486-1318 or www.alban.org ISBN 1-5669-9216-8, \$15.95).
- Offer to help mid-lifers plan spiritual retreats. Provide lists of places that will help guide those who are in crisis for their spiritual journey.
- Provide opportunities for mentoring (either individually or as a couple) youth, young adults or young couples.
- Offer counseling for those who find mid-life particularly difficult. Be aware that some people may enter a period of serious depression during midlife. Intervention and support can be vital for those struggling with the changes that midlife brings.

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