

**Lost in the Middle**  
**Midlife and the Grace of God**  
**Paul David Tripp**  
**Chapter 3 – The Death of Invincibility**

**3. The Death of Invincibility**

- We now come to a discussion for most of us that there's no fooling ourselves any more.
- It is all very hard to face.
- These new feelings of physical weakness and vulnerability are one of midlife's unsettling realities.
- These changes reveal struggles that are intensely spiritual; and therefore, worthy of our attention.
- The goal of this chapter is to examine these struggles in a way that is culturally relevant and gospel rich.

**3.1. The End of an Era**

- Weakness and aging are significant parts of the midlife struggle. It is unavoidable; all of our bodies age and change.
- Aging is a process and not an event, so the signs sneak up on you:
  - Wrinkles,
  - Spider veins,
  - Loss of hair,
  - Muscle loss and softening,
  - Loss of flexibility,
  - Chronic aches and pains,
  - Sagging skin,
  - Tiredness,
  - Stiffness of joints,
  - Rashes,
  - Graying hair,
  - Hair where it shouldn't be (in your ears),
  - Weight gain,
  - Loss of energy,
  - Vision loss,
  - Skin discoloration,
  - Hearing loss,
  - And the list goes on.
- These are not things you want to think about.

**3.2. A Dangerous Intersection**

- Four factors come together at midlife that have the power to make aging a huge struggle.
  - A universal awareness,
  - The assumptions of youth,
  - The focus of our culture, and
  - A condition of the heart.

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Many people get disoriented and derailed when these four factors intersect at midlife.

*3.2.1. A Universal Awareness*

- There is a universal awareness, a grand contradiction, deep inside of every human being. People are not supposed to die.
- Sin brought death into the world and all the aging, sickness, and decay that goes with it. Death is fundamentally unnatural.
- Each time we dread aging or mourn a death, we are crying out for a Redeemer to defeat death forever.
- Aging, sickness, deterioration, and death preach the Gospel because they point to the utter futility of living a life that ends this way.
- Redemption makes the story rational again.

*3.2.2. The Assumptions of Youth*

1. Youth

- Monster Burger -7 inches in diameter
- Monster Fries – small picnic basket
- The Kitchen Sink - 24 scoops of ice cream and 7 different toppings
- we don't even remember feeling stuffed.

2. Today

- There is a vast difference in the way we now think about food, diet, restaurants, and menus.
  - we carefully examine the ingredients on food containers.
  - we count calories. we even understand the danger of Trans fat.
  - we am simply not the same guy who found such delight at Big Bob's. Midlife has changed my perspective.
- DELUSIONS OF INVINCIBILITY
  - We live much of our lives joyfully oblivious about our physical bodies.
  - Eventually, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, we begin to experience the death of our own invincibility.
  - No matter how hard we work to maintain the delusion: everything that lives is in the process of dying.
  - Physical invincibility is a delusion - it is a lie.

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*3.2.3. The Focus of Our Culture*

- The second factor is live in a culture that is obsessed with the human body.
- In the comprehensive secularization of our culture, all that's left standing is physical man. Life is reduced to physical people living in a material world.
- The most important things in life are the things that *you* can see, touch, taste, or hold in your hands.
- Numerous promises of permanent youth if *you* purchase the right set *of* products.
- Let me detail some of the elements of the physical obsession that dominates Western culture.

*3.2.3.1. The Youthification of Western culture.*

- Over forty-five, you won't see yourself very much on prime-time television.
- W. Achenbaum says that a positive view of aging existed in America for almost two hundred years.
- Difference between our cultural perspectives and Scripture's is that while the Bible esteems the vigor of the young, it views old age as a sign of blessing and repeatedly calls on us to honor the aged
  - Isaiah 46:4
  - Leviticus 19:32
  - Proverbs 23:22
  - 1 Timothy 5:1
- The tendency of modern Western culture to despise aging and to worship youthfulness is one subtle indicator of how far it has moved away from a biblical perspective on life.
- In Scripture old age is a sign of God's covenantal faithfulness. It is also connected with functional wisdom.

*3.2.3.2. The affluence of Western culture.*

- Sinners not only struggle with want; they have a terrible time handling blessing. Sin makes all of us scarily self-absorbed and endlessly ravenous.
- Our affluence allows more and more of us to spend more time and money than ever before, doing anything and everything we can to look, smell, and feel the best we can.
- Our affluence does not make us selfish; it simply enables us to afford more sophisticated expressions of selfishness.

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##### 3.2.3.3. *A culture of leisure.*

- Leisure can be defined as the freedom provided by the cessation of work or duty. Work is viewed as the price we have to pay to get the leisure we really are living for.
- First, it looks as though we actually have a work-based culture.
- What has radically changed is our basic *attitude* toward work.
- Second, and not unrelated, is a shift in the way we view leisure. We all need retreat from labor; that is the principle of Sabbath.
- Leisure has become the end rather than a means to the end. It has become the thing we live for.
- Life morphs into an unceasing pursuit of comfort, ease, and individual satisfaction.

##### 3.2.3.4. *The death of eternity.*

- Perhaps the most powerful leaven of the Christian world view is its focus on eternity. We are the people who "fix *our* eyes on what is unseen," because "What is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- Yet in a culture that has presided over the death of eternity, it is very hard to hold physical things in their proper place. Consider what Paul says: "outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).
- Viewing ourselves from the vantage point of eternity helps me to see both processes at once. Yes, the physical me is in the process of aging and decay, but that is okay because after the body has served its earth-bound purpose, we will be given another body for eternity.

##### 3.2.3.5. *The rise of cosmetic technology.*

- A quick nose job, chemical peel, a bit of liposuction, collagen lip implants, a visit to the tanning salon, along with the normal work on the nails and hair,
- It is hard enough for the average middle-aged person to live in Western culture without constantly mourning the loss of his or her youth, but it is even harder when the surrounding culture has increasingly elevated standards of physical appearance.

##### 3.2.3.6. *The media ideal.*

- "Danger - Unrealistically beautiful people inside."
- Popular media dominates
- Projected ideals become the "norms," have a powerful ability to shape the way we see ourselves and others.

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Replaced by someone younger

*3.2.3.7. The death of the Inner Man.*

- The heart as the Bible describes it, is not given serious attention and has been replaced by a widely received determinism.
- Two kinds of determinism:
  - First is the environmental/experiential determinism that says that you are the product of your environment or that you are
  - Second is the biological/physiological determinism that posits that your behavior is caused and controlled by biochemical processes within your body.
- When you are in a culture that underestimates the rich inner world of the heart that culture will tend to think of the physical you as the real you.
- At the very moment that the signs are everywhere in my physical body that we are not what we once were, We are also being bombarded with the message that aging is a curse to be avoided at any cost. It is no surprise that our culture no longer esteems old age and that there is a major industry focused on selling anything that has the perceived power to turn back the clock.

*3.2.4. A Condition of the Heart*

- Empowered by a fundamental condition of heart.
- This condition of heart is *cause central* when it comes to midlife struggles There is a little phrase 2 Peter 1:4 "escape the corruption in the world *caused evil desires*"
- The opposite is true. The culture is corrupt because we are! The culture hasn't produced the condition of heart, but the condition of heart has produced the culture.
- Every other human struggle, has its source in the heart, and the only real solution is in heart change.

**3.3. The Great Replacement**

- Romans 1:25 alerts us to the fact that there is an innate tendency in every human being to replace the *spiritual* with the *physical*.
- The truth of the matter is that life can be found only in the Creator. Yet we seek to find life in the material things,
- Idolatry, in its simplest form, is when replace the worship of God with some physical image or object that we can see and touch.

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- If sin sets us on a trajectory away from the Creator and toward the creation, then it also sends us away from the spiritual and toward the physical. So appearance will trump character.
- Desire for a good thing becomes a bad thing when it becomes a ruling thing. This is our rationalizing what we do.
- Jeremiah 10:1-16:
- The Creator/creature line is the great divide.
- Still, our temptation to replace the spiritual glories of the Creator with the physical glories of the creation greets and grips us every day. It is a constant and inescapable struggle. We deify our physical bodies, physical pleasure, material possessions, the security of a place, the love of a physical person, etc.-while at the same time forgetting the spiritual glories of intimate communion with the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the great Creator.

3.4. Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid

- The thing we have to get a hold of is the realization that our struggle with midlife physical changes actually reveal idols that have been with us for a long time. Aging pumps them up to the surface.

3.4.1. *Physical things are impermanent.*

- Everything that is physical decays, grows old, grows stale, wears out, *or* falls apart. Peter imperishable for the perishable

3.4.2. *Physical things are deceptive.* (See Jeremiah 10:1-16; Psalms 115:5, 135:16; Habakkuk 2:18, 19; Isaiah. 41:23, 46:7). Every promise *of* every idol is a lie.

3.4.3. *Physical things are impersonal.*

- Worship in its purest form is a relationship. We were created for a relationship with God.

3.4.4. *Physical things are enslaving*

- Our desires for physical things morph into "needs," and when they do, we become completely convinced that we cannot live without them.

3.4.5. *Replacing spiritual things with physical things is deadly.*

- Trying to find life outside of the Creator exposes me to that which can only bring destruction and death.

3.5. Putting It All Together

- The struggles of physical aging that so often characterize midlife are the fruit of a deeper struggle. The struggle of struggles is the struggle for the heart.
- So, our struggles with physical aging are the struggles between idolatry and grace.