



# THE MIDDLE AGE MAZE

*An Eight-Week Bible Study for  
Middle Aged Adults*

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# INTRODUCTION

A maze can be defined as a path, or a collection of paths that lead from an entrance to an exit. Usually, the goal of this physical puzzle is to select the right direction out of the maze. Whether it's found in a corn field, a gaming room or even on paper, as you travel through, it can easily cause the participant to become confused, lost, or even disillusioned. The navigation through a maze is indeed a journey, as you try to make the best decisions on which are the right paths to follow.

Middle adulthood can best be described as a maze. In those years between 35-60, individuals can both struggle and flourish with trying to maneuver through the paths of relationships, careers, finances, health, caring for older parents, loss, and spiritual life. Individuals in this age group continually juggle tasks, plan for the unknown, must react to a variety of life altering topics. While this may seem like a daunting task, the middle years lay the foundation for a successful aging experience.

Certainly, there is no way that we will make all the right moves as middle-aged adults. But if we traverse forward in faith, clinging to Christ and His enduring Word, we will at least have a strong foundation to build upon. Every stage of life has its challenges and rewards, and the middle years are no different. Instead of struggling during this time between early and mature adulthood, may we see these years as an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth, especially when it comes to our relationship with Jesus. Christ promises to never leave nor forsake us, and we need to cling to these words more than ever in the season of middle-adult living.

I have several memories of my family's trip to Disney Land. But one experience I will never forget is riding the roller coaster at Space Mountain. The unique thing about it was that this ride was inside—and in the dark! As we traveled up, down,

and through corkscrew turns at high rates of speed, something continued to keep us on the track as we held on for dear life.

In life, it is God that is keeping us on the track during middle age as we hold on for dear life. Through this adventure, may we depend on the Lord alone for guidance, wisdom, and clear minds and hearts.

**In Christ,**

Bradley Hales

*NALC Director of Church Planting and Aging Ministries*

# WEEK ONE: THE MAZE OF RELATIONSHIPS

*Reading: Genesis 27:30-45*

In today's online world, we might call the relationship between Jacob and Esau "complicated". These twins, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah, were constantly in a sibling rivalry. Since Esau was born first, the birthright of blessing and property would certainly go to him. This hairy hunter was favored by his father, Isaac, while the younger son, Jacob, more accustomed with house activities, was more favored by his mother Rebekah.

Jacob did everything he could to steal the birthright away from his brother, including cooking Isaac his favorite meal and tricking the aged, blind, father into blessing him first. This set off a chain of events which caused both hatred and fear between the two — but lead to eventual reconciliation.

With middle age comes a maze of relationships. Whether it's the relationship with a spouse, children, grandchildren, siblings or even friends, they can either be life-giving or life-draining. How are some of these connections effecting your status today?

## RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE

Marriage is the centerpiece of God's creation. Throughout Holy Scripture, we see God's focus on the union between man and woman as it is written in Genesis, Matthew and Ephesians, "A man shall leave his mother and father and cling to his wife. They will be no longer two, but one."

So many facets are involved in the marital bond, but honest communication continues to be the key. Communication effects all areas, and will be the factor in both nuptial strength or struggle.

*What importance do you place upon communication in your relationship?*

**Please read I Corinthians 13:1-13.**

How does the Apostle Paul's description of love compare to the realities of marriage during middle age?

*With all of the busyness and commitments which bombard a family, how is it possible to keep a marriage thriving during the mid-years?*

## **RELATIONSHIP SINGLENESS**

One of the ever-growing realities of middle age is that of singlehood. Whether it be through divorce, death, separation, or even the choice to live a solo life style, more middle age adults are navigating this life station. One of the growing aspects of singleness is a phrase coined "Gray Divorce." Some believe that if their current relationship is irreconcilable, it is better to sever ties because there is a likelihood that they will live longer.

**Please read I Corinthians 7:7-35**

*Paul speaks about his being single as a call. If you are living alone, do you see this as a call or circumstance? What are the benefits of a life of singleness? Do you ever have to deal with loneliness or isolationism? Explain.*

## RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

Through the advent of differing life experiences, the middle years may bring new births, teenagers, changing dynamics with adult children and even grandparenting.

**Please read and discuss Proverbs 22:6, Psalm 127:3, Ephesians 6:4.**

There is such a variety of interactions with children at the middle-age level. Maybe some of these adults are having babies for the first time. Maybe some are trying to parent pre-teens/teenagers, and drama ensues. Maybe there is a maturing relationship with young adults going off to college and other training. And what about the adult children that move back home?

*What has been your experiences in parenting during the middle years?*

*What have you learned? What are the joys? Where have you failed? What would you do differently?*

As grandparenting is becoming a common occurrence during the middle years, we cannot underestimate the influence that they are having on their offspring. Grandparents today are increasingly being used as guardians, child care providers, drivers, and bearers of the faith.

It's also grandparents who are bringing their grandchildren to worship and teaching them about Jesus. Maybe this is a potential evangelism opportunity for the church. A local congregation may want to consider hosting a grandparent's support group or a grandparent's camp to equip these mature adults to better share the faith with their legacies.

Please read and discuss Psalm 71:17-18, Proverbs 13:22, Proverbs 17:6 and II Timothy 1:5

*How do you see your role as a middle-aged grandparent? How are you sharing Christ with your grandchildren?*

## RELATIONSHIP WITH SIBLINGS

Please read and discuss Genesis 37:1-28, 45:1-15

Sibling relationships and rivalries in midlife have a way of resembling how they originated as children. Were they positive? Negative? Was one child the parental favorite over others? Was there a “bully” or a “boss?” Were there good children and black sheep?

In the above scripture, Joseph had a bad relationship with his brothers, as they perceived that he was their father’s favorite. So, out of anger and jealousy, they staged Joseph’s death and sold him into slavery. Little did anyone know that God would work through this event to save His chosen people from famine and starvation. Thankfully, Joseph and his brothers were able to reconcile and forgive.

*What kind of relationship do you have with brothers and sisters? Are you closer to some than others? Are there age differences? How has your upbringing effected these bonds?*



## RELATIONSHIP WITH FRIENDS

*What kinds of friendships do you find yourself having in the middle years? Are they more connected with career? Neighbors? Parents of your children's friends? From your past?*

*Do you find these friendships to be "life giving" or "life draining?"*

**Please read and discuss I Samuel 18:1-5, Job 2:11-13 and I Kings 12:1-15**

These scriptures point to three varying examples of friendship. While David and Jonathan had a deep connection with one another, a covenant, a sacred promise, the other relationships were a mixed bag. Job's friends were there for him in the beginning, but then began to tell him to renounce God when things didn't get any better. When Rehoboam had the opportunity to ascend as king of the united Israel after the death of his father, Solomon, he first went to the older men to gain advice on how to treat the people of the north. When they suggested merciful overtures, he then went to his friends, his contemporaries, who suggested that he treat the people with contempt and hardship. Unfortunately, he followed his "friends" advice. This caused the north to break away and form their own kingdom.

*When you see these examples, how do they define your present friendships?*

Relationships are a key aspect of the middle age experience. They can either help you to find strength, support, acceptance and love, or destructive liaisons can breed negativity, control, and sadness. Even though human relationships will have some element of brokenness, let us strive to embark upon healthy bonds. They will certainly help us along the journey.

## WEEK TWO: THE MAZE OF CAREERS

I once spoke with a middle-aged gentleman who was really struggling in his work. He hated the long commute, unfavorable bosses, and experienced difficulty in supervising other employees.

As we were talking, I asked him to try to begin changing his thinking about his occupation. Instead of looking at it as drudgery, an obligation, a way to make “ends meet,” I asked him to imagine his career as a ministry. Focusing on the things he was doing as a call from God touching other lives on a daily basis. Soon, after our discussion, he contacted me to share that this new understanding of work had changed his whole perspective. He was happier, more relaxed, he treated those whom he worked with better, was more positive at home, and now felt that his career had purpose and meaning

**Please read and discuss Ecclesiastes 3:22, Psalm 90:17, II Thessalonians 3:10-12 and Deuteronomy 5:13-14.**

*How are you presently feeling about your own work life?*

The middle years are usually a time when individuals strive to grow in their careers and make higher earnings. Most people spend 1/3 of their day working. For some, its sole purpose is to make money and support a family. For others, its about creating a better world, or personal fulfillment and joy. Underlying all these things may also be a desire to save for a better life in retirement. During middle age, you find yourself in that continuum, where you are not old enough to retire, and not

young enough to experience the excitement of newly working. I guess some of us can call that “stuck.”

Whatever the motivation, career does affect body, mind and spirit. While a healthy occupation is good, there is always a concern that it could careen out of balance, and “workaholism” could set it. If not checked, this could be devastating upon marriages, parenting and physical/emotional health.

*Do you have a healthy work/life balance? Please explain.*

While work is perceived in differing ways, we must place it in the realm of “vocation.” The word vocation literally means “calling.” God calls us to specific occupations, relationships and encounters to make Jesus known to others. The best thing is that the Holy Spirit “equips” us for this ministry.

**Please read and discuss Ephesians 4:1-12, I Peter 4:10, and I Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**

Working outside the home, in the home, remote, or in-person consumes many hours of our lives. Maybe you are having to work several part-time jobs or becoming entrepreneurs in new fields which provide us energy and passion.

Instead of allowing occupations to be draining or a cause of dread, may we look at our careers as ministries. That in the midst of our working, we can serve, show kindness, concern, love, living our daily faith, and making Christ known. Through our baptisms, we are a part of the “Priesthood of All Believers.”

**As it is written I Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**

## WEEK THREE: THE MAZE OF FINANCES

I clearly remember one evening when my middle-aged parents were discussing finances. While my mother was the “bill payer,” my dad just couldn’t understand where the cash went every month. Even though my mom clearly showed him the check book, he didn’t get it. In exasperation he proclaimed, “We work, and have this money coming in, but where does it all go?”

The middle years are confronted with all types of financial issues. Whether we’re just trying to pay bills, college tuitions, saving for retirement, and even having to supplement the income of our adult children or parents, monetary concerns certainly take center stage. This may propel all in the house to work or even take on multiple positions in order to survive.

But when it comes to financial blessings, what does Christ really want from us?

**Please read and discuss Proverbs 3:9-10, Proverbs 22:7, Malachi 3:10, I Timothy 6:10, Matthew 6:19-21, 24, Matthew 25:14-30 and Mark 12:13-17**

*What do these scriptures tell us about the proper and improper use of funds?*

Instead of just focusing on the “cash capital” for daily living, is it possible to center on our relationship with God, who promises to bless us with the things we need to live?

**As it is written in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”**



Sometimes, we equate wealth, riches and inheritance to only monetary funds. But there is so much more to it than that. During the middle-age period, we began to lay the foundation of the “legacy” that we will be leaving.

While a main definition for legacy is to leave someone money or property in a will, it can also mean to leave something to futuristic generations. What legacy do you want to impart upon our children, grandchildren, church and community? Is it a legacy of faith? A legacy of family? A legacy of love? A legacy of commitment? A legacy of service? A legacy of kindness?

**Please read and discuss Deuteronomy 6:5-7, Deuteronomy 12:28, Joshua 24:14-15, and Psalm 78:4**

*What kind of foundational legacy do you want to start laying for the future?*

## WEEK FOUR: THE MAZE OF HEALTH

In I Thessalonians 5:23 it is written “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As humans, we are comprised of body, mind and spirit. While all these aspects are significant and essential to our very existence, when one of these areas becomes unhealthy, it can affect the others. But, if we strive for healthiness and wholeness in these core dimensions, especially during mid-life, it will have a profound effect upon attitude and continued growth into the latter years of living.

*According to Holy Scripture, why are each of these areas important?*

### THE BODY

Please read and discuss: I Corinthians 6:19-20, Psalm 139:13-14, Proverbs 3:7-8, I Timothy 4:8, Matthew 6:25

In mid-life we do begin to feel those “aches and pains” compared to our younger years. Eating better, exercising, sleep, and other activities are destined to help our physical body stay fit and strengthened.

*Why is “keeping up” the physical body so significant in our daily living, and in our ministry for Christ?*

## THE MIND

During seminary (pastor's training school), I spent the summer in one of Minnesota's state psychiatric hospitals. I received training as a student chaplain. My supervisor always told me that I would see an enhanced amount of mental health issues in the church and community. He was certainly right!

Whether it be anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, or paranoia/delusional thinking, diseases of the mind are real. Thankfully, they can often be stabilized through medication and counseling.

While there can be medical challenges with the mind including mental health, neurological deficits, and even the ravages of stroke and dementia, our minds also have the capacity to seek learning, intelligence and strive for understanding about God.

**Please read and discuss Romans 12:1-2, I Corinthians 2:14-16, I Peter 1:13-17, Colossians 3:1-3, Philippians 4:8-19.**

*What do you think it means to have "a mind of Christ?"*

## THE SPIRIT

During the creation account in the book of Genesis, it says that humans are made in “the image/likeness of God.” Because of this, we are spiritual beings led into a relationship with the Creator. Our spirits desire to be one with the Lord.

This is why it is so important to keep our spirits nourished in God’s Word, worship and prayer. It would be easy to allow the cares and burdens of the world to “wear down” our spirits, and become discouraged. As our spirits are aligned with the Lord, the more inner peace we will experience in our lives.

**Please read and discuss the following texts: Genesis 2:7, Proverbs 18:14, II Corinthians 4:16-18, II Timothy 1:7, I Corinthians 1:30 and John 15:4-5.**



## WEEK FIVE: THE MAZE OF PARENTAL CARE

In Exodus 20:12 it is written, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Along with being one of the Ten Commandments, it is also the only one that offers a promise for its adherents.

So, what does it mean? According to Luther’s Small Catechism it states:

*“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.”*

In many instances, the middle years finds us having to offer more care to our aging and older parents. While the Scripture is clear on our response, it may be easier said than done. We may be called to care for those we don’t always enjoy being around, or have fractured relationships with. However, that doesn’t mean we can neglect or deflect our responsibilities. Helping maturing parents can be challenging at best. Often, their needs will demand our attention.

Those in middle age can be sometimes characterized as either the “Sandwich” or “Club Sandwich” generation. Those in the Sandwich Generation are called upon to care for both children and parents. A newer identification, the Club Sandwich Generation, are those thrust upon to provide guidance and support to parents, grandchildren, and adult children. Obviously, any of this care giving will be stressful, financially draining and time consuming.

When it comes to the parental unit, we may be compelled to offer physical care or hire those who can help. It may require obtaining legal means to watch over finances, or to share that it's time to "relinquish" some independence such as driving for safety. It may even cause us to have to navigate these services living away, or even leaving our present situations to be with mom and dad. We may also have to navigate our own sibling relationships to determine what is best for the parents.

When these issues arise, it's always hard to know where to turn for support and tangible response. Please consider contacting the local human services department, and every region has an organization called the "Area Agency on Aging." By accessing its national website, [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org), and by using your parent's local zip code, you will be able to access the local Triple A, and its variety of resources when it comes to care giving, home delivered meals, transportation, and housing options.

The reversal of roles may seem unusual and uncanny. We are now being called upon to care for the ones who cared for us. As we may have caused our parents angst, their aging proclivities may cause us frustration and exasperation. But we strive to keep our parents as independent as possible, helping them to continue growing in their relationship with God.

*What are the present needs of your parents? How are you addressing the challenges? How would you characterize your relationship with them?*

**Please read and discuss Proverbs 23:22, John 19:25-27, Ephesians 6:1-3**

## WEEK SIX: THE MAZE OF LOSS

**Please read and discuss Ruth 1:1-5**

Naomi knew loss. Outside of her family being forced to move to a foreign land because of famine, she experienced the death of her husband and two sons. She was alone, and in a perilous economic state. No wonder she was bitter, afraid, and grieving.

Loss begins to accelerate during the middle years. The loss of health. The loss of parents. The loss of relationships. The loss of employment. No family is immune. A few years ago, my forty-something year old family member began to endure the journey of divorce, as their spouse departed to form another family. Alone, she became the main parent of her two daughters, had to move into another residence, and re-enter the full-time work world. Has the transition been smooth? Not by a long shot. But through support, strength, grit and perseverance, she has moved forward.

*What kinds of losses have you experienced during your middle-aged years? We're they expected or unexpected?*

Loss is just a part of life. That's a given. But the question is, "How can we learn to navigate through the losses and move forward with our lives?"

**Please read and discuss Psalm 34:17-18, Psalm 147:1-6, Matthew 11:25-30, II Corinthians 1:3-4, I Thessalonians 4:13-14**

So, how do we deal with the losses? We somehow learn to work through them. Whether it be through prayer, a listening ear of a friend, tears, or even professional counseling, it's important that we do not "get stuck" in the grief.

If the loss is connected with issues surrounding the need for forgiveness, it is vital for this process to proceed. Because of anger or a feeling of injustice, it would be easy not wanting to forgive. Demanding a pound of flesh, holding on to negative feelings, and wanting to wallow in not "letting go" may seem more preferable than offering pardon. But if we refuse to offer absolution, won't it most likely hurt us in the end?

As it is written in **Matthew 6:14-15:**

**"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."**



## WEEK SEVEN: THE MAZE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Finding time for Jesus.

These are familiar words which are frequently echoed within the middle age reality. The busyness of career, family, caring for parents and recreation can starve our spiritual lives when it prohibits us from worshiping, bible reading and prayer.

The solution? Carving out those moments with Christ.

**In Psalm 46:10:**

**“Be still, and know I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth.”**

Faith can certainly be stretched and challenged during the middle years. I’ve heard about the struggles of believing, the importance of wanting children to receive Christian education, and the thoughts that eventually, we will find the effort and passion to spend with Jesus. But it’s ultimately going to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit, touching our very hearts, and bringing us back into a relationship with Christ.

As we continue on the journey, let us read and reflect upon those essential promises of God in Holy Scripture-

- **Ephesians 2:8-10- We are saved by Grace through faith in Jesus Christ.**
- **Romans 10:8-10- We’re saved by faith in the risen Lord.**

- **Romans 8:35-39- Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
- **Matthew 28:20- Jesus will be with us always until the end of the age.**

Middle age is an ideal time for growth in discipleship. As continual students and learners, we are being provided with the opportunity to realize that its not about us, but it's all about the Savior.

**Please read Proverbs 3:5-6. How is this scripture speaking to you?**

A large aspect of discipleship is striving to be more “Christ Like” in our daily living. Even in our brokenness, we are being called to love, encourage, serve, forgive, and share.

**Please read and discuss John 13:35, I Thessalonians 5:11, Acts 1:8, Luke 6:37, I Peter 4:10-11.**

Through the craziness and unpredictability of middle age living, the constant variable which provides the strength and endurance to move forward is God himself. Whatever second, minute, hour or prolonged time we can take to spend with the Lord will not only benefit us, but others in whom we touch. Connecting with Christ will nourish our souls, provide joy, and anoint us with a sense of purpose and meaning.

**In Psalm 63:5-8: “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.**

## WEEK EIGHT: THE MAZE OF PREPERATION

One of the things I've enjoyed during my life is participating in musicals. I've been a part of several productions and have learned varying things about acting, music, stage management and publicity. When the practices begin for the show, it's messy. You wonder if the performance will ever come together. But in the end, when you witness opening night, you realize that everything you did to prepare led up to the event. That's the connection between the middle years and aging.

Middle age living is messy, at best. But it does prepare us for a positive aging experience. If we boldly move forward during the middle years, expecting that it will be neither pretty nor perfect, relying on Jesus for guidance and direction, then these years will be educational but impactful. It all hinges on relying on Christ.

The relationships, the careers, the health, the finances, the losses, the caring for parents all significant in their own right, will be more easily traversed when the Lord God is at the center of all. Instead of looking at middle age with trepidation, may we see it as a journey to grow ever closer to Jesus and his will for our lives.

Aging is a process. No one knows the exact triumphs or tragedies which will be encountered along the expedition. But as we do our best, it's only in these involvements where we will experience the living Christ.

Growing up, my sister had hamsters. She had an elaborate set-up in the back room of our house, as the rodent cage was filled with tubes, wheels, and crisscrossing mazes. Nightly, these pets would run furiously through all these plastic juggernauts, creating mayhem and folly. When we would awake in the morning,

these exhausted hamsters would be nuzzled and sleeping in the corners of their abode.

As we travel through the mazes of middle age living, may we be led into the right directions, finding our ultimate rest and peace in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

*Where is Jesus leading you on this middle age journey?*