

The Mid-Life Crisis of Abraham

What is a mid-life crisis? A midlife crisis is a transition of identity and self-confidence that can occur in middle-aged individuals, typically 45–64 years old. The phenomenon is described as a psychological crisis brought about by events that highlight a person's growing age, inevitable mortality, and possibly shortcomings of accomplishments in life. This may produce feelings of depression, remorse, and anxiety, or the desire to achieve youthfulness or make drastic changes to current lifestyle. Common symptoms, other than buying a red sports car or having an affair with a younger woman are as follows:

1. Desiring to quit a good job.
2. Unexplained bouts of depression when doing tasks that used to make you happy.
3. Changing or investigating religions, churches or new age philosophy.
4. Change of habits. Activities which used to bring pleasure now are boring. Unable to complete or concentrate on tasks which used to be easy.
5. Excessively buying new clothes and taking more time to look good.
6. Wanting to run away to somewhere new.
7. A desire or obsession to get into physical shape.
8. Irritability or unexpected anger.
9. Leaving (mentally or physically) family or feeling trapped in current family relationships.
10. Looking into the mirror and you no longer recognize yourself.

Perhaps the best way to describe this stage of life is to sense that you are stuck. Not going anywhere. Not progressing. Our children have left home. Our homes are paid for. We have accomplished all we can reasonably expect professionally. What is left to live for? A long, slow and increasingly painful decline. Many turn to suicide. And how did Abraham react to his own mid-life crisis, stuck in Haran? How did this happen?

Gen. 11.26-28. Abraham was raised in Ur of the Chaldees, midway between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. It was a center of advanced civilization. Most homes were two levels, with a central courtyard. Running water. Functional sewage system. Schools taught writing, reading, arithmetic, history and the arts. Royal tombs, palaces, temples, irrigation systems and trade indicate advanced civilization.

Acts 7.2-3. God appeared 1st to Abram in Ur, not to Terah, Nahor or Lot. The command was to leave his country and his relatives and move to a land that God would show him. Country and relatives. The first stage of this transition happened when Abram moved with his father Terah and extended clan from Ur to Haran.

Gen. 11.31-32. Haran was in northern Iraq, in the fertile crescent. Terah was getting old, so Abram stopped on the journey to Caanan and remained there until his father died.

Gen. 12.4. Terah died when Abraham was 75 years old. Childless. He hadn't accomplished his main goal in life – to reach Caanan. Without land of his own. Without a heritage. Without the energy of youth. He had been stuck in Haran, both honoring his father while waiting for his father to die so he could move on with the accomplishment of his life goals. His life was going nowhere, literally! While in Haran, Abram was well and truly stuck! How did he respond to this mid-life crisis?

Honored his family. It was a complex family. **Gen. 20.12** – Abram married his half-sister, Terah's daughter by another wife. Abram was both Terah's son and son-in-law. In the compound were 3 generations, Terah, Abram and Lot, and inter-generational families can be a source of both joy and difficulty. It was also a spiritually divided family – Terah and Nahor worshipped other gods (**Josh. 24.2**). Yet, Abram lived at peace with his spiritually divided family. He must have been respected by them, for they willingly left sophisticated Ur to move with him to Haran, and hopefully to Caanan.

Likewise, we all have family commitments. Despite the fragmentation of family in western society, we all have elderly relatives, children or grand-children. It is all too easy to walk away, to wash our hands, of "troublesome relatives." Yet, we demonstrate our walk with God by how we relate to our families, no matter how complex or spiritually divided they may be. Abram honored his pagan father by remaining with him until his death. He witnessed his father's slow decline and eventual death. We also witness our parents' slow decline and eventual passing. It is tempting to wish for the next chapter of life to hurry along, but to care for, and show respect and love for, our declining parents, is in itself a

manifestation of our faith in God and obedience to the 5th Commandment. I am not “stuck” and going nowhere, but I am a strong pillar with a deep foundation, strong enough to provide support, care, love and honor to those in my family who are physically or spiritually weak.

Grew with God. At no stage did Abram lapse back into the comfortable paganism of his immediate family or of the neighboring peoples. Yes, he and Sarai were getting old and had no children, but no, they didn’t participate in any of the pagan fertility rites to encourage childbirth. The promise of children and becoming a great nation did not come until Terah died. Yet, Abraham was faithful to God’s call, trusting that God had a purpose for him, which appeared to be going nowhere while they were seemingly stuck in Haran and Sarai left her childbearing years behind. Abraham had to learn that God’s timetable is not necessarily our timetable. God’s purposes are not limited by our human frailties or limited understanding of what is possible and what is necessary at any given time. Abraham’s trust in, and obedience to, God, is shown by the fact that as he journeyed, he left a trail of altars as a witness to his faith (12.7, 8; 13.18).

Likewise, when it appears that we are “stuck” in life, going nowhere fast, God is inviting us to a deeper level of trust. It is a mistake to assume that just because things are going well in life, things are well with God. Likewise, it is a mistake to believe that just because things aren’t going well in life, that things are not well with God. We tend to grow the most spiritually in difficult times, rather than easy times. To be “stuck” means God is inviting us to a deeper level of trust and obedience than we have experienced before. There is no record of Abraham building altars prior to being stuck in Haran. But after Haran, they appear regularly. Clearly, he grew during this time – and so may we. So maybe we should not be impatient and asking “Why, God?” when it appears we are stuck, but “Lord, what are you teaching me? How do you want me to grow so I can conquer the next challenge and thrive in the next chapter of my life?”

Prepared for the future. Abraham knew that the journey to Caanan would be dangerous. He knew that whether journeying through Syria, or living among the heathen Caananites, or whether they journeyed down into Egypt, there would be danger. Caanan was a chaotic mixture of 7 people groups with multiple city states, multiple kings, multiple alliances, multiple battles and multiple gods. He was entering the proverbial “bad lands.” Abraham prepared for what he knew lay ahead by training and equipping his household for war, 318 trained men in total (14.14). More on this another evening....

Likewise, God allows us to be “stuck” precisely so we can be prepared for what He knows we will face in the future. Maybe being “stuck” is not a curse but a blessing given that we may conquer whatever giants we face in the next chapter of life. God may be giving time to build savings for unexpected expenditures, to invest for our retirement, to rest and recover from the rat-race of life and frenetic careers, to recover from the abuse we have put our bodies and minds through, to be spiritually, financially, emotionally, physically and intellectually ready for the next chapter of life.

Conclusion

Mid-life crisis? It happens to the best of us. Nobody is immune. But what may be a crisis in our own eyes is really an opportunity from God. It is our chance to honor our families, to grow with God and to prepare for the future. And when God next revealed Himself to Abraham in 12.1-3, Abraham was ready to go! He could respond immediately, because being “stuck” in Haran was God’s way of preparing Abraham for the next chapter of life. By God’s grace, may each of us experience our own mid-life crises as God-given opportunities to grow and to be ready for God’s next call in our lives.

Kind regards,

Conrad.