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How to Have a Midlife Crisis

July 6, 2003

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This is a difficult week for me. I'm walking into a crisis tomorrow night, July 7, at the stroke of midnight. You see, my father turned 84 on June 9 of this year. On August 5, I will be 42 years old. Do you see what that means? Do the math. At the stroke of midnight July 7, I will be exactly half as old as my father.

All my life I've been *less* than half as old as my father. All the *rest* of my life I'll be *more* than half as old as my father.

You can't argue with math. I'm getting old. Next year my son will be in high school, and I'll have two daughters in the junior high youth group. They *argue* with me. They think I'm *old*. My brain's old, my body's old . . .

"I had a friend was a big baseball player back in high school
He could throw that speedball by you
Make you look like a fool boy
Saw him the other night at this roadside bar
I was walking in, he was walking out
We went back inside sat down had a few drinks
But all he kept talking about was
Glory days well they'll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye
Glory days, glory days" (Bruce Springstein)

Those glory days have passed me by! And I'm about to have a midlife crisis July 7, Monday night, at the stroke of midnight! I'm *middle-aged*!

Now, I know some of you *older* types are saying, "Oh, you're not *that* old. You're not really middle-aged." Well, I don't know what you think middle means, but when I do the math, it's pretty clear.

I heard on TV that the average, white male lives to the age of 73. Mid means middle. Divide 73 by 2, and you get $36\frac{1}{2}$. I passed midlife $5\frac{1}{2}$ years ago! How long does middle-aged last? — 10 years maybe? That means I passed middle age on February 5 of this year. What's after middle age? — *Old age*! I've been old four months and one day. You can't argue with math.

Did you know scientists say that you reach your maximum number of brain cells at the age of 18? My brain has been shrinking for 24 years! My kids not only argue with me, but they're starting to *win!* Scientifically, that makes sense.

If you're 18, the next time you argue with your parents say, "Mom, Dad, you need to listen. I have more brain cells than you." I dare you to try it . . . see what happens . . .

But now listen, before you get too smug, Mr. Big Brained 18-year-old. Have you ever stopped to consider that time is speeding up the older you get? — that, in fact, your senior year in high school seemed to last 25.9% as long as your first year in school? Admit it . . . it's *true* . . . 25.9% as long. That's because of Pete's Theory of Special Relativity. It's like Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity, only better and more practical.

Einstein said time is relative to the speed of light. It's not. Time, at least experiential time (how we experience it), is relative to your birthday.

When you are 1, 1 year is your whole life. That's long!

When you are 5, 1 year is $\frac{1}{5}$ your life — not as long.

When you are 18, 1 year is $\frac{1}{18}$ of your life.

See, the older you get, the faster time goes by. So parents say, "My, how fast they grow up! It seems like only yesterday!" Little kids say, "I'm *never* going to grow up."

My dad told me last week, "It seems to me like I'm still 17, and then I look in the mirror and I'm *shocked* to see this old man staring back at me." See, time speeds up on him.

People wonder what I do during the week. Well, I do complex mathematical calculations. This week I plotted experiential years compared to solar years. These are my computations [Exhibit A]. (I know there's some kind of formula from Calculus for this, but I can't remember it. See, I'm getting old . . .) Look:

When you're 1, 1 year is a whole lifetime.

When you're 5, 1 year is like $\frac{1}{5}$ as long as that first year.

When you're 42, one year is like 2.38095% of your first year and goes by 42 times as fast as your first year! This is life: [hand is slow and then fast into other hand].

Anyway, you add up all my 42 solar years in experiential years, and it's like I've only lived 3.7289975 of the years that count. But if the standard, white male lives to 73 solar years, that's 4.874386 experiential years. Subtract what I have lived, and I have 1.1453885 experiential years left to live! In experiential years (the years that count), 77% of my life is over!

And now, Mr. Smug Big Brained 18-year-old, do the math. Do the calculations, and you'll find that the average, white male experiences middle age at 9 years 9 months and 7.62 days . . . which

means I reached midlife in experiential years in the 4th grade on April 12, 1970, at 4:22 p.m. . . . probably during an episode of Gilligan's Island on channel two. If I remember correctly, that was a pretty tough time for me.

All that to say that almost everybody in this room is middle-aged or older; is losing brain cells faster than they're getting them, and "time slips away and leaves you with nothing, mister, but boring stories of glory days."

So then, I'm perfectly, mathematically justified in having a midlife crisis . . . and maybe you should have one too.

So now you may ask, "Exactly how *do* I go about having a standard midlife crisis?" Well, classically midlife crises come with gold chains, leisure suits, and chest hair. But, of course, that's only a stereotype. They come in a variety of forms and are non-gender-specific. Whatever the case, a standard midlife crisis is a way of hanging on to this world and doing battle with time. And it includes at least the following: caution, indulgence, and denial.

1. *Caution*. Play it safe. Health care and herbal remedies are big. Don't risk your life, because you don't have that much of it to risk.
2. *Indulgence*. (This can conflict with #1.) Indulge your appetites while you still have them. You only go around once, you know, so grab all the gusto you can get! Well, what is the gusto? — Usually *safe* gusto . . . beer, salad bars, Vegas, and golf. In midlife crisis, men buy new Ferraris . . . and then drive 55 mph. (That's, like, bad stewardship!) Indulge your passions safely, because you could die. Grab as much of this world as you can. Hang on to the glory, because it's passing you by. Of course, this is a classic time to have an affair, because who knows how much longer you're even capable of that kind of thing?
3. *Denial*. This is logically inconsistent with what I just said, but all denial is. So deny the obvious, lie about your age, tell yourself you could still play in the NFL, and work that comb-over.

Anyway, a good midlife crisis is doing battle with time, by hanging on to this world and your life. Caution, indulgence, denial.

Yet that does present some problems for people like us, people who say we follow this Jesus fellow. Jesus said stuff like this:

"Take up your cross." That's not safe.

"Whoever would save [preserve] his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?"

- James says, "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

- John says, “If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you.”
- Hebrews says, “Let us lay aside every weight and sin, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”
- Paul writes, “I press on for the prize of the upward call, forgetting what lies behind.”
- Paul also tells us we’re in a “battle with principalities and powers and world rulers of this present darkness.”

So isn’t it rather obvious that a midlife crisis can be a great tool for the Evil One? Because with it he can make us . . .

- Play it safe, drop our crosses, and stop battling.
- Indulge all our worldly desires, indebting our hearts to the world.
- Deny there’s even a race or a battle at *all* (only salad bars, Vegas, and golf).

And this is the ironic part: With a good midlife crisis, he sucks all the life out of whatever life we have left to live, so we live like zombies.

Now, I’m sure you want to ask, “Well, Saint Paul, how on earth are we to avoid being trapped in perpetual midlife crisis, in light of the *flawless*, mathematical logic presented by our pastor today?” Well, I’m sure Paul would say, “Yes, it was flawless, mathematical logic, and so first I would take issue with the figure he was quoted from TV for the average lifespan of the standard, white male.”

See, Paul teaches that we are destined for an eternal weight of glory . . . beyond all comparison . . . so redo the math. Instead of a finite number, add infinity to that number. I do remember this from calculus . . .

$$73/2 = 36.5$$

but if Paul’s right,
 $73 + 8/2 = 8$

In Christ, you can never reach middle age, because you’ll live forever. You’ll never reach half your Father’s age. He is eternal. And if we do our figures in experiential years, I think Paul would say that actually you haven’t even *begun* to experience real life!

A Christian is to avoid the standard midlife crisis
by redoing the math.

And now some of you say, “Oh, come on, that’s so obvious. I know that.” Well, if you know that, if *we* know that, why do we still:

- Play it safe with our lives?
- Consume so much in a world where people starve?

- Occupy our minds with salad bars, sports cars, and vacations instead of dreaming about the day we see our Father face to face?

Why do we live like tourists in Bermuda shorts at Disneyland rather than the soldiers we profess to be?

Why do we let the afflictions of this world steal our joy and fill us with fear, such that we sit down on the racecourse terrified to move?

Why are we so terrified to get old and die and see Jesus?

Paul wrote, “Oh, what shall I do? I’m hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and go be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the body is important for your sake.”

Why are we so afraid? Paul would say it’s because we haven’t taken the helmet. In Ephesians he writes, “Take the whole armor of God that you may stand in the evil day Take the helmet of salvation.” In I Thessalonians 5:8 he says, “For a helmet, [put on] the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus.”

Don’t be afraid to die.

Remember Andrew’s message last week? In Christ you’re totally forgiven, totally desired. You cannot make Him love you more than He already does. He’s dying (actually *did* die) to hold you in His arms. Take the helmet of the hope of salvation. A helmet covers your mind; your mind is where you do the math. Protect your thinking with the helmet.

So when the Devil tempts you with caution and safety, put on the helmet and remember “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” That makes you outrageously courageous and radically dangerous, for the world and the Evil One have lost their grip on you.

In The Screwtape Letters, the senior demon writes to his nephew demon giving advice.

The long, dull monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather. . . . Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is “finding his place in it,” while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home on Earth, which is just what we want. . . . Whatever you do, keep your patient as safe as you possibly can.

To live we must die—must pick up a cross, and crosses are not safe or indulgent. When Satan tempts you with indulgence, when he whispers to you, “Do you want to go to your grave never having experienced this pleasure or having indulged that desire?” — put on the helmet and remember where you’re going . . . *forever*. “All things are yours in Christ Jesus,” writes Paul. The Psalmist says, “At His hand are pleasures forevermore.”

I believe no real desire—no true desire—will go unfulfilled in eternity, for every evil desire is a broken *good* desire. God will give you the desires of your heart. Then all the pain and longing of this world simply prepare you to receive your heart's desire forever.

Paul wrote, "These slight, momentary afflictions [beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks] prepare us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Christian, glory days *cannot* pass you by. They are eternal, and all your longing here is meant to prepare you to receive them there.

Every indulgence and desire will be fulfilled (endless sports cars and salad bars). Yet it appears there's one thing you can't get there that you get here: affliction—sufferings—a cross that you share with Jesus *here*.

You only go around once, so go for the gusto and pick up a cross.

When Satan tempts you with denial, put on the helmet. Denial is a strange thing. It's living in fear, but not *facing* your fear. Put on the helmet, redo the math, and face your fear.

- Don't deny the day you die, because then you deny your hope.
- Don't deny the cross, because then you deny Easter.
- Don't deny the finish line, because then you deny the race.
- Don't deny your death, because then you deny life.

Redo the math,

Set your eyes on the prize,

Put on the helmet of the hope of salvation.

. . . unless, of course, you don't have one. Do you have one? Do you have hope? If not, maybe you *need* a midlife crisis . . . not a standard one, but a good one. They say "good is the enemy of the great." Have a *great* midlife crisis! Don't deny the math. You are as good as dead! Why not let go of this world, die to yourself, and get it over with?

Have a great midlife crisis that takes you past the Ferrari dealer, past the travel agent, past the affair, and all the way to the foot of the cross, where you call out for help, where you die, where you're born again and God redoes the math for you.

God adds infinity to your finitude, eternity to your temporality. He gives hope, and "hope does not disappoint us." That hope of life makes life worth living *now*. Hope doesn't only mean more time in the future; hope means a different kind of time, even *now*. Hope gives meaning to every moment. Hope tells us who we are. We are defined not by where we've *been* but where we're *going*.

In Romans 8, Paul writes, "In this hope we are saved." Right before that he writes:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail

together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

Jesus said we must be born again to enter the kingdom. I've *been* born again, because it's a done deal in eternity. But in space and time, I'm *being* born again.

According to Scripture, this whole world is like a womb preparing me to be born into the arms of my Father. So affliction and pain are a sign of travail and labor. (It's not only the mother who experiences the labor). And unmet desires are a sign I'm being prepared for another world.

Martin Luther said that if an infant could reason, surely it would wonder, "Why do I have a mouth and hands and feet? They're of no use here in the womb. Why do I have eyes unless they're meant for another world?"

That baby would hear sounds, but they would be muffled and distant — the sound of its father, but it would be indistinct. The sounds would be confusing . . . just as we hear sounds of the Father in this world, but they are muffled and at times very confusing.

And just as the baby would wonder why it has a mouth, we wonder, "Why so many religions in the world? Why this hunger for spirituality? Why this need to pray? What is this appendage called a conscience . . . justice, love, faith? What good are they in a world where I can exist just fine on TV, cheeseburgers, and salad bars?" — just like all that baby really needs is an umbilical cord. "Why these taste buds when I've got this great cord?"

That umbilical cord is like the things of this world, and this world is like a womb. And witnessing the death of a Christian in this world is like watching a birth from inside the womb.

A womb mate would see this:

pain,
 agony,
 loss,
 messiness,
 great confusion,
 a man hanging on a cross.

But outside the womb, you would see . . . *Easter*. You would see flowers, candy cigars, new brothers and sisters, laughing doctors, a teary-eyed mother, a proud father holding his newborn in his arms for the first time.

Pain completely eclipsed by joy.

When my first son Jon was born, the doctor let me cut that cord. It was pretty cool . . . kind of like, "Welcome to life, my new best buddy! You won't be needing this any more. Welcome to the land of cheeseburgers, pizza, and Dairy Queen! Time to use that little mouth and those hands!" I held him in my arms, and the voice of his father was clear as a bell.

Now I ask you, What baby ever had a mid-gestational crisis? Well, many do, I suppose. They don't choose it, but it's one of the saddest realities on this planet: a baby that hangs on and commits itself to the womb, refusing to develop those appendages, or refusing to be born.

A Christian having a standard midlife crisis is like an infant having a mid-gestational crisis: that is, we hide from the labor pains. We refuse to develop the appendages of faith, hope, and love. We hang on to the umbilical cord. We love the womb and are terrified to pass to the other side where our Father waits with open arms.

So just like John writes, "If we love the world, love for the Father is not in us."

About nine years ago, around 4:30 in the morning, my son Coleman Dan was being born. We had waited so eagerly for him, but he seemed to refuse this whole birth thing. Labor would start and stop, start and stop, start and stop. I had talked to Susan's tummy saying, "Hello in there! You can come out now! What are you doing in there?"

Grandmas and Grandpas Coleman and Dan were eagerly waiting; Coleman's brother Jon and sisters Beth and Becky couldn't wait to get their hands on him; our room was ready, all the stuff in place, even a birthday cake, streamers, and balloons; Susan was groaning in travail. I stood there with scissors, excited that I got to cut the cord. I figured he had been hanging on to that cord long enough. It was time to start really living!

The pains were getting stronger and stronger. That's the way it is with birth . . . and death. It hurts most right before the finish line, which is the starting line.

At about 4:40, we caught a glimpse of his head and then his face. And then I saw the doctor get frantic. Coleman's head was purple. I shot a glance over the doctor's shoulder to see that the umbilical cord was tightly wrapped twice around little Coleman's neck. I knew what that meant, and I started to panic. What had sustained him in the womb was now killing him in birth.

Well, praise God for the doctor! She took a scalpel and cut that old cord. She cut the very thing that had sustained Coleman in the womb. Coleman took a deep breath and let out his first scream (and he's been screaming ever since!) He kicked his legs, moved his hands, and he *lived*. He lived in this world because he died to the old one.

Will you let the surgeon cut the cord?

Will you surrender your old attachments at the cross?

Will you surrender what used to sustain you—your life—and be born? "In this hope we're saved."

Do you have hope?

If you don't have hope, you can receive Him now. In Colossians, Paul calls "Christ in us" the "hope of glory." Our hope is actually the Living Christ in us being formed in us. It was my life—the father's life, received in Susan—my bride, that is somehow Coleman. We have a living hope that is the Father's life—Christ Himself—in us. He is our immeasurable weight of glory. He helps us die, and He is our life.

So now, if you've never had a midlife crisis, maybe you ought to have a great one . . . all the way to the cross. Ask yourself, "Do I have hope?"

The word "crisis" is from the Greek "krisis." It means judgment. In Chinese, the concept crisis is two words together: "way" and "gee"; "danger" and "opportunity." A crisis is a *dangerous opportunity*.

This table is a crisis. God the Father offers us His life, the body and blood of His Son—His Word—His Seed. And He pleads, "Let me be your living hope, your glory. Will you surrender your life and receive mine?" It doesn't matter where you've been, but where you *want* to be. Pray:

"Father, I give you my life. I surrender.
Thank you for giving me your life."

For on the night our Lord was betrayed, He took bread, and having given thanks He broke it saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you."

When He said that, the disciples must have frozen in their seats, because He told them, "Drink my blood." For thousands of years, the Jews had been told to never, *ever* drink the blood. Why? — The life is in the blood. But Jesus said, "Drink it — my life in you."

Surrendering your life doesn't mean you have to sell your house, sell your car, and donate your liver right now. But it means you say to the Father, "They're all yours. When you want to take them, I'll try not to complain, because you gave me your life."

In Jesus' name, put on the helmet. Amen.

Every day may you redo the math. As far as I see it, there are really only two possibilities:

Either I live some 73-odd finite years and then die, in which case time is slipping away, life really has no meaning, and I had better just grab every bit of pleasure and indulgence I can out of this world; and suddenly renting porn, getting drunk, and wrecking my marriage kind of makes sense . . .

OR

This whole thing is true. It's not *kinda* true; it's either true or it's not true. And it's true. God has taken these 73-some odd years and added infinity to my finitude, eternity to my temporality. And that changes everything. Suddenly the math changes everything! I wake up in the morning, tired and exhausted, but I know that I'm racing towards the finish line!

My dad is 84. Sometimes I look at him and think, "I remember when you moved everywhere faster than lightning. And now it's just work for you to even breathe, to sit up, and to make it through the day."

But, you see, my dad is still running. He's running because he sees the finish line. He's even said to me, "Peter, I'm so excited about getting there and seeing everybody! It's just that I'll miss you." I say, "Don't worry, Dad. I'm already there." According to Paul, we're already "seated in the heavenlies."

Every day redo the math. Realize that you weren't made for this world. You were made—you're being made—for another one. And you will receive an immeasurable weight of glory beyond all comparison! What could that possibly be? — *Jesus Himself*, and all things with Him.

In His name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Pete's Theory of Relativity

Solar Years	Experienced Years	Solar Years	Experienced Years
1	1	46	.021739
2	.5	47	.021275
3	.3333	48	.020833
4	.25	49	.020408
5	.2 (1/5)	50	.02
6	.1666	51	.0196078
7	.142857	52	.0192307
8	.125	53	.0188792
9	.111 (2:437193)	54	.01854818
10	.1	55	.01821814
11	.090909	56	.01789714
12	.083333	57	.01758359
13	.076923	58	.017274329
14	.071428	59	.01697915
15	.066666	60	.0166666
16	.0625	61	.01637374
17	.0588	62	.0160903
18	.0555	63	.015825
19	.0526	64	.0155676
20	.05	65	.01531511
21	.047619	66	.01506773
22	.04545	67	.01482533
23	.043478	68	.01458782
24	.041666	69	.01435513
25	.04	70	.01412714
26	.03846	71	.0139027
27	.037037	72	.0136828
28	.035714	73	.01346763
29	.034482		
30	.0333		
31	.03225		
32	.03125		
33	.030203		
34	.029411		
35	.0285714		
36	.027777		
37	.027027		
38	.026315		
39	.025641		
40	.025		
41	.024790		
42	.0238095		
43	.0232555		
44	.022727		
45	.02222		

* Dead for Standard White Male = 4.874386 E.Y.s - 32289975 = 1.180365 E.Y.s left to live
 * Petr in E.Y.S Life expectancy = 7289975 = 76.5101% (23,989%) at my life left
 * Mid Life in E.Y.s = 4.87436 = 2.437193 E.Y.s
 * (42) S.Y.s = (3.7289975) E.Y.s

Average White Male reaches Experienced Middle Age at 9 yrs 9 months + 7.62 Days S.Y.
 Peter Hiatt = Born Aug 5th 1961 at 1:30 AM + 9 yrs 9 mos. 7.62 day = April 12, 1970 at 2:52 pm (adjust for Birth time)
 Peter Hiatt reached mid-life at 4:22 PM April 12, 1970

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