I’m running a little bit late today. I had to park my new chopper on campus and I wasn’t used to knowing where to put my motorcycle, but I’m here. We’re talking about middle adulthood today. We’re gonna finish up middle adulthood and talk about emotional development. And I think any time that you mention middle adulthood, what’s the first thing that comes to mind? Maybe not the first thing, but what do we often think of? Midlife crisis. And so what we want to do is to talk a little bit about midlife crisis, what it is, how prevalent it is, and so I thought I would try to at least reflect some stereotypical characteristics of what a midlife crisis might look like or characterize.


[Inaudible student response]

And what you said, I think, is often characteristic of trying to regain youth in any way that you can. We tend to think of midlife crisis as fairly dramatic or drastic changes. Often you’ll see how reflective this would be or not be of a real midlife crisis — I don’t know. It’s not uncommon for those middle-aged adults like myself that tends to be losing some hair in an attempt to try to cover that up. Often sometimes stereotypically a characteristic of a change of clothing style. I literally went to the mall and I asked for some help — you know, could someone help me pick out something that would appear to be uncharacteristic of me, and this is what we came up with — kinds of things. We often think of, you know, very stereotypically someone buying a sports car or buying a motorcycle. Again, something that would be very different than their typical lifestyle.

Anything else come to mind when you think of a midlife crisis? Or at least from the standpoint of kind of the stereotype that we have of a midlife crisis. I could mention a couple of the suggestions that were made as I dialogued with some of my friends about trying to figure out what to come up with. One of my friends said, “What you
really need to do is to get you a young female on campus and come into the room with her on your arm, saying this is the new girlfriend.” My wife vetoed that one and said that was not okay. But again, we often think of stereotypically, you know, the middle-aged man or female, I guess, who ends a long-term relationship and then takes off with someone considerably younger. Again, part of that notion of maintaining or regaining youth in some ways.

Anything else? There’s another kind of a stereotypical image that tends to go somewhat with a midlife crisis — again, the stereotypical image of it. We often think of someone who makes very, very drastic changes in careers kinds of things. Now, anybody think of anyone — and again, don’t mention any names or anything that would describe that — let that person’s identity be known. Anybody know anyone who went through — again, what we would think of as kind of that stereotypical midlife crisis? What were some of the characteristics or behaviors of that person? I typically have somebody in class who knows someone who kind of did go through a full-blown kind of midlife crisis. Anyone know anyone at all?

[Inaudible student response]

I have thought about getting my ears pierced but I thought that was just too extreme for one class. But again, that might be characteristic. Well, we’ll go on and see if anyone else can think of anyone who — characteristics of midlife crisis or --

[Inaudible student response]

Shaved off his beard, changed to contacts. A lot of times whether you do a hairpiece or will maybe color hair, you know, or do some things again to make it — again, typically it’s an effort or an attempt to be younger. Again, we often think of buying a sports car or those kinds of things.

Anyone else know of anyone who — like I said, typically I have somebody in class who really knows someone who’s gone through a full-blown midlife crisis. Now,
I’m not surprised that there really isn’t someone in here. Because the reality is that midlife crisis does not occur as often as once thought. I mean, really I think there was a period of time when there was this kind of notion that — you know, that during the middle years particularly males were gonna experience a midlife crisis and that was part of what it meant to go through the middle adult years. And really that’s not true and really isn’t characteristic of this stage.

Now, clearly there are some individuals who really do have a full-blown midlife crisis or at least that stereotypical image that we have of that. But there are only a small percentage of individuals who actually make drastic midlife changes. I think what’s important is I don’t think any one of those characteristics that some of you have identified in and of itself would really necessarily mean midlife crisis. I think it takes several of those combined that would really characterize a crisis. I think there clearly — and for a variety of reasons, you know. Buying of the sports car, you know. You may think, “Well, that’s that midlife crisis.” It may simply be something that someone really always wanted and finally had the finances to be able to afford it. Or at a time in their life where buying a sports car seemed feasible, where earlier in life when you had children it just wasn’t a practical vehicle. So one of those characteristics in and of itself. People change in appearance to look younger, feel younger. That in and of itself probably doesn’t reflect midlife crisis.

But I think when you see — again, characteristics where people combine a number of things all at once and make really drastic changes, then you may be getting closer, you know, to that. And that would be that stereotypical image of not only somebody changing the dress but the person who changes their appearance, leaves their job, does a dramatic lifestyle change — you know, does kind of pursue a lifestyle that would be more characteristic of someone in young adulthood and abandoning any of the norms and patterns that was typically their life. And that could be more
characteristic of a midlife crisis.

I had a student one semester who was talking about and felt like her mother had kind of gone through a midlife crisis, and somewhat struggled with that. Again, she was a college student and her mother had begun to dress much more like young adults. She was wanting to go to the clubs with her and hanging out with her friends. And then when mom who is single and divorced begins to date her daughter’s aged friends, that may be getting closer, you know, to some of the characteristics of the midlife crisis.

I’ve known some — and I don’t know if I’d necessarily consider it a crisis or not — but I have known of some during this stage — and again, it’s somewhat untypical — that made very, very drastic career changes. I heard one semester a student talking about someone — I don’t remember the specifics now. I believe the individual was a fairly prominent doctor and he always had a desire to be a chef. And so dropped a very promising or very successful medical practice and began a chef in a restaurant. That would be somewhat characterized as fairly drastic. May not necessarily mean a midlife crisis. It may be someone simply pursuing a goal that they always had.

Now, leaving a prominent job or moving to a secluded island, you know, or living in the mountains, you know, may be somewhat more characteristic somewhat of a midlife crisis kind of situation. But again, it’s not something that occurs nearly as frequently as we once thought. And again, a small percentage make what we would call really drastic life changes.

But there are. There are some individuals that again, you know, hit that middle adult stage, that really struggle with some of the stereotypical images that somehow it’s the starting of the end and really get overly concerned about that, and feel this really insurgent need to really reclaim somehow their youth and hold on to their young adulthood, and have a hard time accepting the reality of the changes of life. Part of the realities of the changes of life are those things associated with getting older and the
aging process. And some don’t make a good transition into that and some have a harder time accepting that and work really hard to move in the opposite direction.

It is — in spite of the fact that the vast majority don’t experience a midlife crisis, it is a time, I think, for many adults to reevaluate their life. It’s a time to take a look at what goals they have achieved. It’s a time of looking at what goals have not been achieved. And in that process may be a realization of some lost opportunities. Now, why would this be a critical stage for reevaluation? I think throughout our lives we’re constantly kind of reevaluating who we are, where we’re at, and where we’re trying to get to. But I do think that middle adulthood marks a significant period of reevaluation in terms of looking at goals in our lives.

Why would that be? Why would this be an important time in terms of looking at what have accomplished and what we have not yet accomplished? Looking at what our relationships are and our level of satisfaction with those, why would middle adulthood be a particularly significant moment?

[Inaudible student response]

Exactly. You are in your prime in many, many respects, but you’re also — you get real in touch with — that time is limited, you know. If there are some other things that you want to do or that you want to accomplish or that you want to change, when becomes the time to do that? Now. Why? What probably is the reality if you wait until the next stage of life and realize some of those? Probably at least the perception would be that it’s gonna be too late to worry about or try to make some of those changes. But if there are some things that I really want to fulfill and really want to accomplish, now may be the time to really begin to make some shifts. Not the drastic shifts that may be reflective of a midlife crisis, but just the realization of here’s some things I would like to do or I haven’t been able to do and I’ve still got time. And I may have the opportunities to do that that may be lost permanently if I don’t make those shifts right now.
Now, can you think of some examples, just general examples, of some things that people may have realized, one, that they haven’t achieved yet or may get in touch with some lost opportunities that they may try to, at least to some extent, correct or compensate for? And it does tend to occur at this stage of life, I think, often. I think one of the main ones is relationships and I think one of the places sometimes it happens is relationships with children, very likely. I saw this in my own — I saw that when my dad got into his forties, you know — and again, you know, like so many, when you’re really young, you’re starting your family, and you’re starting your career, a lot of that focus — I think particularly for males — is on that career. I need to have a successful career. I want to do well so that I can provide for my family. And so that my family will maybe have the things that maybe I didn’t have growing up, you know, in some kinds of ways. But what happens sometimes is that pursuit of career success or some — you know, it could be other hobbies or it could be whatever it is — that all of a sudden what you find is you’ve lost some time watching, experiencing, or being involved with your child during some key moments.

I’ve mentioned a couple of times, you know, my father passed away about a year and a half ago. When we were having conversations kind of towards the end of his life, one of the things we were doing is -- we were talking about one of the songs that we played at the funeral service which was one of his favorite songs. Some of you may have a reference for it, but it’s song that dates our family and generation, was “Cat’s in the Cradle.” I mean, “Cat’s in the Cradle” was a song that really talks about lost opportunities in some ways. It talked about a father who got in touch with maybe not having spent as much time with his family as he would have liked to, and then all of a sudden his children grew up, had their own families, and they didn’t have time to spend with their parents. You kind of watched the struggle of wanting to reconnect and struggling with trying to find time.
And there was no question in my life that — you know, my dad was really interested and always valued the time we had while I was an adult. I think some of that was to kind of make up for the fact that in a lot of ways he wasn’t as present maybe as he would have liked to have been when I was a kid growing up, particularly during my adolescent years. I think he got in touch with that and somehow wanted to try to make up for that — you know, again in those middle adult years. And that may not only be with children. It may be a realization of maybe some time that was lost with a spouse and wanting to reconnect and get to know each other again, and not lose that opportunity.

Can you think of a couple of other maybe general examples of something at this stage of life someone may realize and it may be kind of their lost opportunity to make a shift or a change? Either in terms of lost opportunity or a goal that maybe hasn’t been achieved yet. Anyone think of an example? Could be education. I mean, we’re seeing more and more people maybe who, for whatever reason — whether that’s undergraduate or maybe graduate school — who during the younger years worked, supported the family while the children were younger and growing up. It’s something they always wanted to do, you know. And people will look at and wonder, “Well, why now?” Some of it is not so much that they’re necessarily planning on launching a career, you know, when they’re 50 or 55 as much as they want to simply be able to do what? I did it, you know. I finished that degree that I wanted to earn or I got that graduate degree, you know. I think it’s amazing that people would make that commitment not necessarily because they have to, but because it was an important goal in their life and to be able to say, “By golly, I did it.”

Anybody think of another example? You know, for some it might be — yeah?

[Inaudible student response]

You know, traveling. And it may be during the earlier years, maybe not financially
being able to do that. And again, it may be simply just not taking the time to do it. You know, feeling like “I’ve gotta do this, I’ve gotta accomplish this.” Again, a lot of times that pursuit of a career and being successful. And then all of a sudden you realize, you know, life is short. There’s a lot of places I want to see. Just maybe within our own country. Much less people who decide, you know, “I’d really like to travel outside of this country and see other parts of the world.” And some people say, “Well, I’m gonna wait until my later years. That’s when I’m gonna travel. Why now and not later?” I know this would be somewhat true for me, I think.

[Inaudible student response]

I don’t know what my health may be like. Now I’m feeling good. I’m feeling healthy. Now’s the time when I maybe could most enjoy those experiences. Not that I can’t enjoy them in later life. But how many people have I known who said, “I’m gonna put this off. I’m gonna wait and do that at the next stage in my life.” And then they get to the next stage and it doesn’t play out the way they thought it would. All of a sudden their health declines and they’re not able to do it. The opportunity is lost permanently.

I think you’ll see some around careers, jobs, in terms of maybe making some shifts or making some changes. How many people, say, have always wanted to start their own business? It was always kind of waiting until they were at the place where they felt secure enough. When families are young and there’s the uncertainty of that. I know there was a point in time in my dad’s life where he made a number of decisions around jobs because they were a little bit more secure, a little bit more stable. I know that one of the things he always wanted to do was kind of chart out there on his own and kind of do his own thing. And there was a period of time when he took that shot in his kind of middle-adult years when the kids were kind of growing up and not the same levels of responsibility.

For some it may be something as simple as starting a new hobby, you know, or
trying something different than they’d ever thought — something they’d always wanted
to do but never tried to do. I’ve known of some middle-aged adults who actually took
up playing an instrument. People say, “Well, that seems kind of strange,” but it was
something that they wanted to do. Or started playing golf or tennis, or something again
that they always wanted to learn to do. Never had the opportunity or never took the
opportunity to do, and then decided at this point in life, “By golly, I’m gonna do that.”

I know my wife and I — now it’s been six years ago — we as a family had made
a really — and I wouldn’t call it a midlife crisis, but it clearly was a shift — we made a
very conscious decision. We a number of years ago had bought a lot on Table Rock
Lake. We were living in Arkansas. My parents had already retired in the southwest
Missouri area, actually down on the lake as well, and we bought a lot. And then we
built a little cabin on the lot and we were beginning to have conversations — and again,
from where we were living it took us anywhere from three, three and a half hours, to get
to the lake. And so we came up many weekends. You know, you drive three and a
half hours to come up. You’re there for 48 hours at the most, if that long, and then you
drive back three and a half hours.

So we were having a variety of conversations, you know, and eventually we said
two things. And our child was getting older. We were thinking, “Gosh, wouldn’t it be
nice to live closer to the lake where we could use it more often?” It was something that
our whole family really enjoyed, you know. And then we also were having
conversations that we would really like to kind of be in one area for kind of what we
thought were those elementary — ‘cause at that point Matthew was just starting
elementary school. We really wanted him to be kind of in the same place. In my wife
and my lives, we had moved a lot. I mean, I’d hate to venture how many houses we
had lived in during the time that we had been married. And so we were wanting a little
bit of different stability.
I was a tenured faculty person at the university I was at, which means I had a
certain sense of security there. And finally one day we just decided. You know,
sometimes you can make some choices and decisions just because they’re the right
thing for you and your family. And so I’ll never forget. I had driven up to Springfield.
I’d seen an ad. I was kind of looking to see what possibilities would be in this area. I
remember I’d found out that OTC was looking for someone to teach a course. And so I
drove up and I had a conversation with the person who was the department head at
OTC and he said, “I’ve got this course that you could teach twice.” And he said, “You
never know. There may be some other opportunities.” So I went back and talked to
my wife about it. And this is a pretty drastic kind of shift to go from a full-time tenured
position to possibly teaching per course one or two classes.

So we talked about it and I e-mailed back to this guy. I said, “If you can get me
two classes, back to back, I’ll come.” Within about two hours he e-mailed back and
said, “Done.” I remember shortly after that the following Monday I resigned from my
tenured faculty position and everybody thought I was crazy, you know. And anyway,
long story short, we had made a decision that we were intentionally gonna move to this
area and then figure out the rest of life. And that was pretty drastic, you know, for
people who had lives that were pretty secure, pretty stable, and pretty fixed. And it was
probably one of the best decisions, you know, that we ever made.

But for us it was the realization that if we were gonna make any kind of an
intentional choice like that, now was the time. If we waited much longer, we would be
so ingrained in where we were at and in our careers that we would not consider making
a move. And so we made that — and literally there was a period of time when the only
jobs that either one of us had guaranteed was teaching two classes at OTC. Now, you
can begin to figure out the finances of what two classes paid versus a full-time job, and
it was a fairly drastic cut.
But things worked out. I actually ended up the first semester with four classes. Within a year I was teaching classes at OTC and here, and then four years ago was hired on full-time here. And so it was one of those things that really worked out as we hoped it would, earlier than we thought it would, but we didn’t know going in. We know that if we were gonna do it, now was the time to do it. And so it is that stage when you’re gonna make some shifts or changes, it’s the time when families are likely to do that. You wait much later, those opportunities may very well be gone.

We find that during this period of time — and again, a lot of it is a time of reflection. Self-reflection, re-evaluation of some things. During this stage many young adults have a rise in self-awareness. Again, we’ve talked in here a lot about self-concept and self-esteem. One of the things that we find during this stage — it’s almost like a kind of coming together of that self-concept that’s been evolving and emerging ever since — when we first started talking about as a very young child. And as we kind of transfer through the middle childhood years and then into adolescence and young adulthood. I think by the time we hit middle adulthood in many cases we come to the point where we really are able to accept our total self. It’s really the place where we can really look at and say, you know, here’s who I am. Here are my strengths, here are my weaknesses, and I’m able to accept myself really as a total human being. Not that I’m still not working and continuing to become more and more the person that I want to be. But there really is that acceptance and the realization of who I am right now.

The other thing that tends to be characteristic of that self-reflection is middle-aged adults tend to become really autonomous in their decision-making, both on an individual level as well as a family level in a sense that up to that point there may be a lot of other factors that are influencing the choices they make. When I made the decision to leave one position that was fairly secure and go to another, most people
would say that’s pretty crazy. How in the world could you do that? How could you go from something that’s really secure? You could be here the rest of your career and go to what you don’t know is gonna turn out.

But I’d come to the point that this was really my life, my decision. Even though I would listen to those other perspectives, I still realized and my family realized this needed to be our independent decision based on what we thought was best. Not what friends thought, not what colleagues thought, not what extended family members thought, but what was best for us. I think it’s really that point in life where you really come to terms with who you are, what’s important to you, what the values are, what you want in life, and you make decisions pretty much autonomously.

Again, as we started talking about midlife crisis — and again, a lot of times the notion of the midlife crisis tends to be a reflection of middle-aged adults, not only it being that negative stereotype of life being downhill but we tend to think of it as a time again stereotypically at one point of it being a type when people are really unhappy, they were depressed, and that that’s what launched the midlife crisis. But in reality, the majority of middle-aged adults actually are very happy with their lives and very satisfied.

In fact, what we find is middle-aged adults, apart from the stereotypes, actually experience greater happiness than young adults. Now, I’m gonna put up a couple of reasons for that. But can you think of reasons? And again, as you look at your parents and other adults that again are in that 40 to 65 age range, you may find that to be somewhat true for them as well. Most are not unhappy. Actually, most tend to be pretty satisfied with most aspects of their lives. Why would middle-aged adults be happier or experience greater happiness than young adults, do you think? Or can you think of any reasons? I’ll put two or three up here in a moment.

[Inaudible student response]

Middle-aged adults, particularly when you get to the middle middle-aged — I
They’re about as financially stable — I mean, they have a good retirement and prepared for that, but financially they’re pretty stable. They’re pretty secure. And they often will have the financial resources not only to meet — again, if you think about young adulthood and you think of your own life right now, wherever you’re at with that. My guess is for most of you it’s a little bit of a financial struggle, you know, and that you’re pretty much trying to kind of meet the basic necessities. Every once in awhile you’ve got a little bit of extra, but you don’t have an extravagant amount of money just to spend on anything and everything. But you do reach a point — and my wife and I can honestly say this, you know. We’re not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, you know, but we’re beyond the point where we have to be concerned about the necessities of life. We have extra money that we — discretionary money that we can do some things that we couldn’t do when we were younger and when children were younger.

And it is, to be honest with you, a nice feeling when you don’t have to worry every day about finances. If you just really want to do something unexpected, something kind of out of the norm, you can afford to do it and it’s not gonna negatively affect your finances. And many middle-aged adults find themselves in that place, you know, again in terms of those financial resources.

Can you think of any other reasons why middle adulthood would be a time of fairly high satisfaction?

[Inaudible student response]

What we tend to find — you know, again, as we come out of adolescence and through young adulthood — in most cases we tend to find fulfilling relationships and they tend to continue to improve and to get more fulfilling, more satisfying, and more meaningful in a lot of ways. That adds again to that overall life satisfaction.

Anything else you can think of?
[Inaudible student response]
I think clearly life does slow down some or at least — and I'll put some of these up so you have a chance to kind of start to write 'em down. But what we find is for a lot of middle-aged adults is they kind of begin to come to terms with what's really important and what's not important. I think they slow down the racetrack. I mean, I think when we're young adults we kind of go through life almost on like a racetrack — you know, full speed ahead. We go on and off the off-ramps at the same speed as we are on the interstate. Pretty soon we begin to kind of reevaluate our priorities. I think some of what we begin to realize is some of our pursuits maybe aren't as important as we once thought they are and we kind of slow life down a little bit. Focus on things that maybe really are priorities. I think clearly that's a part of it.

We know one of the things that we find is that middle-aged — the period of middle-age is not any more stressful than when we were younger in terms of the events. In fact, in many ways they may be less stressful. There are a lot of stresses in terms of young adults. There are clearly changes that are taking place but the changes don't tend to be maybe as drastic and dramatic. They're more kind of level, kind of evening off, than those initial changes of falling in love and getting married and having children. You're kind of settled into some patterns.

So the events don't tend to be any more stressful and what we also find is that middle-aged adults actually tend to handle stress better than younger adults. Now, this may seem overly obvious, but why? Can you think of some reasons why middle-aged adults handle stress better?

[Inaudible student response]
Bottom line, lot of practice. When you look at all those years during young adulthood, you've had life experiences. And what we find — and it goes back to those cognitive abilities that are at their prime — the ability to cope. The ability to solve problems.
The ability to make decisions. To learn from life’s experiences and lessons. Bottom line, middle-aged adults tend to handle life better. Also tend to not take everything quite as seriously. Tend to decide what’s really important and what’s not important, what to focus on and what to let go.

The other part of it is they have more resources. Now, not just in terms of financial resources that we’ve already talked about, but they tend to have a pretty strong support base in terms of the support of improving relationships with children, but also a much stronger and meaningful support network of friends and maybe colleagues that they work with. And so not only do they have those coping abilities but they’ve got the resources to adjust to whatever stresses they may be faced with, and so they tend to handle that better, keep the balance stress a little bit better than young adults do, and, in turn, tend to experience a higher level of life satisfaction.

However, there is — and I wouldn’t perceive or see this as a negative — there is a change in perspective on time. This is in terms of how middle-aged adults see time and view time differently than young adults. And what is that? Can you think of how — the perspective of how I view time shifts? You’re 20, 21, mid-twenties, and you’re looking at your life and your future. How do you see it?

[Inaudible student response]

In fact, if you’re a young adult, what do you believe about how much time you have left? Forever. I mean, that’s kind of your perspective. You’re in your mid-twenties and you think about old adulthood, and you think, “Gosh, that’s forever away.” In fact, part of you actually believes that you will never get there, you know, or that that’s so far away that it’s not a concern. And it’s not a concern at that point in your life. You know, 40 or 50 years from now seems like a forever away.

When you hit middle adulthood, what does shift in terms of how you see time? What do you get in touch with? Reality. And what is the reality?
You're at least halfway there and the second half is not all guaranteed of how much of that second half you're gonna have. Because there’s a lot of unknowns. You hope it’s a lot but you don’t know. All of a sudden you get in touch with not so much the time that you’ve lived. When you’re younger you kind of think about the experiences in life you’ve lived and the time you have left is forever. Now you’re aware of the life you’ve lived but you’re also very much conscious of and aware of the life that you have left. And that to some extent there are limits to that.

I think with that, literally, you know — I’ve mentioned several times my dad’s passing. I think what had more of an impact on me than my dad’s passing in some ways was my sister who passed away a year earlier than my dad — you know, who was 13 months younger than I was. And, man, that was just like a light going off in my head, you know. I mean, how could someone younger than 50 pass away? And she was very, very young. And then I got in touch with the reality that there aren’t guarantees, you know. And what I got really in touch with was how important it was — not that life hadn’t been good. I think life had been good up to that point. But I got real in touch with I want to make sure of how I use the time from here on it and that I really know what my priorities are. And that I’m really focused. I’m making sure I spend my time in the places that are important and that wasting time wasn’t a good thing. It again was just a realization, a reality check, about a changing perspective that happens for a lot of middle-aged adults. And that’s not a negative thing. It’s just a refocusing of a perspective.

Again, there is for many more consciousness of young/old polarity. Now, any thoughts about what this means? Young/old polarity. One way to think about it is — and some of you are maybe kind of there — you think about the adolescent, and particularly the adolescent as they move to early young adulthood. What can’t they
wait for? What do they live for almost daily? Particularly the adolescent. What do they try to hard to do? To grow up, to be older. I want to take on those responsibilities of life. And if you look at many of the behaviors of adolescents, particularly some of those at-risk behaviors, some of the motivation for that is to feel or be perceived as being older than they are, to be grown up, to take on some of those adult kinds of behaviors and patterns. And there’s also like this urgency to get older as fast as I can.

But all of a sudden when you begin to hit middle adulthood, what kind of shifts? Some hit the brakes. Others just become aware of it. And so what do people work really hard at? Some harder than others. Being young — or at least not getting older. But there’s a real focus on — you know, at one point I couldn’t wait to get older and now I want to stay as young as I can for as long as I can and I don’t want to get any older. And again, not reflective of midlife crises, but at least reflective of the realization and the consciousness of that.

Again, I remember my dad. He, very much like me, lost his hair even somewhat earlier than I did, but he was really conscious of it. And so this was back many, many years ago, but he was one of those who got one of the first hairpieces. He was like me. He had hair on the side, not much on top, and this was one of those hairpieces that kind of got tied into your hair on your side. So it was kind of a certain element of permanency. You were guaranteed to be able to shower in it, swim in it, do anything you wanted in it, but you had to have it retied down every so often. It was really funny. As soon as he could, he got — and up until the time he retired, he always wore it. You never saw him without it. I remember the first time my wife saw him without it. Because, I mean, I had gotten used to it. She was kind of shocked at it. But for him, the hairpiece was really important. It was a way for him to feel and look younger. He didn’t drastically change his dress that much but the hairpiece was characteristic of that.

But you’ll find others who’ll kind of try to dress more youthful. We spend billions
of dollars as a society trying to stay young, you know. Again, all you have to do is turn on the TV network — you know, Home Shopping Network — and there are numerous products all guaranteed to do what? Make you look younger, feel younger. Guaranteed to get rid of those wrinkles or whatever it is. And so we see that kind of focus. For me, that was one of the things that I never got bothered by. I knew my hair was gonna thin and eventually be gone. I never exercised ever a thought of getting a hairpiece. After having this one, I don’t know. I may change my mind and might stay with this one. I don’t know. I think I just kind of accepted the fact that I was gonna get older, changes were gonna take place, and it wasn’t anything I was overly concerned about. Some more so than others.

Again, contrary to — you know, kind of to the myth of the stereotypical image of midlife crisis, most middle-aged adults are satisfied with their jobs. A small percentage actually make job or career changes. I didn’t change my career at all; I just changed my location. I changed where I was working but never really exercised much change in the career path that I’d chosen. Some are forced sometimes to make job changes, career changes. I know many who in middle adulthood did make career changes and decided — you know, “I’ve been doing this for 20, 25 years. It’s not what I really want to do” -- and then make a shift to something that they really were interested in. But that doesn’t tend to be the norm. Most have not only reached their peak earning but also have reached kind of the peak of responsibility in those chosen careers and in their workplaces.

In some ways, though, the responsibility has kind of peaked and they have a lot of maybe supervisory responsibility. At the same time, they don’t often have that same demand to perform, to climb the ladder. They’ve kind of climbed the ladder and they’ve kind of gotten to where, you know, they hoped to get. I know my dad in his final years before he retired in a lot of ways clearly was very secure in his job. He enjoyed it, but it
wasn’t overly demanding at that point. He was kind of in a role that he knew his job, he knew it really well and could do it, and so day-in and day-out was not stressful at all. He looked forward to retirement, you know, when that occurred, but going to work wasn’t a stressful experience as it was when he first started out in his early twenties. So again, most are relatively satisfied. They enjoy their jobs and don’t make changes.

And finally we come to — again, all throughout the stages we’ve looked at Erikson’s psychosocial issues, again looking at positive outcome, balancing that with corresponding negative outcome. What we see during middle adulthood is what Erikson refers to as gerativity versus stagnation. Gerativity versus stagnation. And again, I think if you look at some of the points that Erikson is trying to make, I think, recaptures a lot of what we’ve already said during this session. It really captures that whole issue of middle-aged adults looking at and reflecting on their life. And here it begins to kind of take maybe — it’s related but takes a couple of different kinds of focuses or interests with that.

I think during young adulthood and what Erikson would suggest is that a lot of the focus during young adulthood tends to be a self — and I don’t mean a self-centeredness, but tends to be focused around self-goals. And again, some of those self-goals may be related to family goals and some other things. But it’s about getting my career going and being successful in my career. I’m successful in my career in terms of what it can provide and how I can support my family, you know. Starting a new relationship and that relationship being really well and satisfying, and having children and doing pretty well in that role of parenting. But it does tend to be a lot of focus kind of around self and self goals.

But when I hit middle adulthood — and in most cases, hopefully, as I begin to look at the goals I’ve achieved, hopefully in most cases I’ll come to the realization that I’ve achieved many of those goals, those personal goals that I had. And so what I
begin to do is to start to shift from not only an inner kind of focus, but I begin to shift to an outer focus. There really becomes a point where I begin to — as I look at what I’ve achieved and what I’ve accomplished, and I begin to take a look at and ask myself, you know, how purposeful and meaningful has my life been. Because if I come to the point where it has not been, I still have the opportunity to make some changes. What begins to be part of that focus as I look at the meaningfulness of my life is to begin to ask the question, you know, not only what have I accomplished, not only what have I received, but now I begin to ask a different question and that is the question what will I leave behind, you know. Often there becomes almost that question of what will my legacy be. What will be said of my life at the end of my life?

And that becomes again a real important question at this stage. Because if I wait until later adulthood to ask that question, what might I find out? And we’ve already said that to some extent. What if I wait until late adulthood to ask the question about what my life has meant? It may be too late to do anything about it. So now it becomes a time when I really begin to kind of look at that. And I really begin to kind of look at that in terms of all phases of my life. Now it’s not just a question about maybe what I’ve accomplished in my career in terms of reaching a particular position or level in my career, but I may be asking what have I contributed to my field. Have I contributed anything to my field that will exist and live beyond me? Not for a sense of status or recognition as much as something that continues beyond me that I was a part of helping to develop and helping to shape.

You know, you look around this campus and you see buildings that have people’s names on them. They have people’s names on them because these are people who’ve made significant contributions either to the university or to their field. It’s kind of a — and for them there is a legacy, something that kind of continues on. I’d like to be able to say at the end of my career that maybe I started something that will
continue to live on when I’m long gone. Not to necessarily be identified with me, but only to be able to say that that was something that I helped get started from the ground up. When I’ve retired and I’ve gone on, it’s still going on, you know. And so something I was a part of shaping has a life beyond just when I was involved in it, but continues long after I’m directly involved in it. That kind of becomes part of my legacy in terms of my career in my field.

And I think we do the same thing in terms of relationships, you know. I want to hope that what I’ve contributed to the raising of my child — you know, and as he gets married and has children, that I’ve been a positive influence in his life and the shaping of his life. That some of maybe what I’ve taught him or what I’ve instilled in him will be instilled in his children. And then in his children. It’s more than just leaving a name. It’s leaving a part of who I am, you know, and that my life has meaning beyond just the things that I’ve done. They continue to have a life beyond that as well.

Versus — and I think the other place is people begin to look at their lives and hit a place of what would be the negative outcome, stagnation. Because I think also at this stage is the realization that life isn’t over, that we are still continuing to develop and still continuing to grow in every phase of our lives, and are we in touch with that in a part of seeing that continue to happen. Or do I reach a point where I feel like nothing is moving forward, you know. All of a sudden I’m in my job. Nothing’s challenging anymore. I’ve come to this point where I realize I’ve been doing this job for 35 years and I don’t really enjoy it. Or I find myself in my relationships where they’ve just kind of leveled off. Maybe that’s been happening for years, but all of a sudden I get in touch with the fact that they’ve lost some of the meaning and I don’t know what to do about that.

If I begin to feel like that is the way my life generally is, then that sense of purpose and meaning may be a sense of no purpose, no meaning, no fulfillment. And
again, there’s still an opportunity to maybe do something with that. But who wants to move into the next stage with that sense of stagnation versus moving into that next stage with that sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, continued growth, and that commitment to what I’m not only giving to my field and to my relationships but to my community and how I’m invested in my community. Maybe I started a festival in my local community and long after I pass on, that festival is still happening every year. And I was a part — I was on the committee that helped make that happen. Again, a part of what I’ve left behind. And I’m much more prepared to take on the tasks of later adulthood if I feel like where I’m at right now is in a good place and still moving in a positive direction. Gerativity, a sense that I am preparing for and leaving behind and giving back rather than only receiving, versus feeling a sense of stagnation, a lack of meaning and purpose and fulfillment.

We will begin next time taking a look at later adulthood, one of the final stages of life.