

Lost in the Middle

*The struggles of midlife begin long before midlife –
Don't wait until you're lost.*

By Paul David Tripp

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Leader's Guide to be used with the conference on DVD
(Ten 25 minute sessions on 3 DVDs)
for Small Groups or Individuals

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LOST IN THE MIDDLE

LEADERS' GUIDE

As leader, you will facilitate moving the group through the material. You do not need to be an expert on the topics but you will be best prepared if you first watch the DVDs on your own beforehand. You may also want to review the notes in this leader's guide and be prepared to share your own thoughts—especially to opening questions and application questions. You can also become even more prepared by reading *Lost in the Middle* by Paul David Tripp (Shepherd Press, Wapwallopen, PA: 2004).

Opening Discussion Questions: These questions are designed to create discussion and stimulate initial thoughts that will help participants connect the ideas of each session to their own lives. They are designed to be discussed before viewing the material of each session. If you are leading a small group or class, you should consider how much time is available and limit the opening discussion based on the amount of time you have. You may need to select only one opening question that you think would be most “discussable” by your group. Another option is to have participants share something from their *Personal Reflection* (see below) from the last session.

Scripture: These passages are ones that are referred to in the session.

Notes: The notes section follows the slides on the DVD and provides a place for notes to be written down and referred back to.

Discussion Questions: These questions are intended to help the participant review the content presented in each session. Possible answers for each question are included below.

Personal Reflection: These questions are designed to help participants apply the principles and key ideas to their own lives. No answers are given in the Leader's Guide to these questions.

Application Questions: These questions are designed to help participants apply the principles and key ideas to their own lives. As leader, you may want to allow time for each participant to answer questions on their own and then select a question(s) that you think your group will be willing to share their answers with one another. If you have a large group you can have participants break into smaller groups of 2-4 to share their answers.

Further Study: This brief section includes verses from the Bible or from Dr. Tripp's book, *Lost in the Middle* that connect to and support the principles and key ideas presented in each session.

NOTE: Encourage yourself and/or your group to write down answers as much as possible. Writing it down helps stimulate thinking and strengthens commitments.

SESSION 1

OPENING DISCUSSION

1. The middle of an activity IS sometimes more difficult than the beginning or end because things don't always go as we planned; the need for perseverance sets in; we begin to realize it is going to take more work than we expected; we become tired.
3. Psalm 88 reveals despair, hope, and confusion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. It allows and invites us to be honest that life can be painful in this fallen world; it reminds us that God is willing to walk with us in our pain; it allows us to cry out to God as a way of worshipping him; Follow-up Question, if necessary: how is being honest with God an act of worship? -- because we are being honest with the one we believe has the grace and power to help.
2. We can remind ourselves who he is—for instance, that he loves us or that he wants what is best for us even if we do not understand.

APPLICATION

1. We should be honest about our feelings; to cry out to him as the source of help.
2. We can encourage others during times of darkness by:
 - A) Being honest about the pain and not minimizing it or making them think that their pain is sinful.
 - B) We can remind them of who God is.

SESSION 2

OPENING DISCUSSION

Similarities between Psalm 4 and 88: In both, David is asking for help from God; he recognizes it is God who can save him. In both, David describes himself as distressed. In both, David is suffering at the hands of men.

Differences between Psalm 4 and 88: In Psalm 4 David speaks more of the joy that he has in God; it has a much more positive mood toward life and God; he seems to show more trust than in Psalm 88.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. David's situation could lead to anxiety and frustration because his son is after his life; he is sleeping in caves; he has been betrayed.
David is able to feel distress yet sleep in peace because he knows the situation is not safe but that the situation does not control his safety—God does.
2. The Bible can help us through mid-life even though it does not specifically address the topic because it presents the story of God's grace in a fallen world; it reveals God's principles and the way he works; we can apply these principles and knowledge of God to all situations of life including mid-life.
3. Life is *spontaneous* because we do not know exactly what will happen in our future, but we can be *prepared* for whatever comes by having an accurate diagnosis of the possible problems and the correct cure.
4. The danger of making our situations the root of our behaviors and responses is that: 1) we will be controlled by the situation; 2) it is a lie; the truth is we live and respond from what is in our

hearts not from what happens outside our hearts; 3) we will not seek God's grace and seek to change the true problem which is our hearts.

APPLICATION:

2. Leader invites participants to share any part of their letter.

SESSION 3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Living between "the already and the not yet" means: already Jesus has come, already we have been given the Spirit; but we are not yet perfect and have not yet experienced God's full redemption and kingdom.
2. Dissatisfaction is good because it admits and recognizes that we are not "home"; we live in a fallen, imperfect world and the best is yet to come.
3. We can feel disoriented in mid-life because we have attached our identity to things that change: our career, our physical appearance, our relationships, etc Follow-up question: what is identity amnesia—forgetting what our identity in Christ is.
4. Discouragement can result when we have lived for our own desires and dreams and it has not come to fruition.

SESSION 4

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Dread, disappointment, disinterest, distance and distraction lead us to God's grace by making us aware of our true need; it reminds us of the lie of our own self-righteousness and self-sufficiency; reminds us that we are not sovereign; reminds us that there is a greater glory than the things of this earth. Follow-up question, if necessary: What is this kind of grace called? Uncomfortable grace.
2. Ultimate glory = God's glory that can only truly satisfy the needs of our hearts.
Sign glory = the glory of this physical world that point us toward the ultimate glory.

SESSION 5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul's section on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 connects to his instructions about marriage and family and the church in the rest of the letter because each of those areas are spiritual wars; in those areas we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of darkness that war against our soul; in those relationships we battle with our sinful nature.
2. This spiritual war within us often begins with an unexpected, unprepared for, and possibly undesirable event that leads to a new awareness of our frailty and weaknesses Follow-up questions, if necessary: how does this connect to God's purpose in bringing struggles into our lives? The struggles are there to reveal where our weaknesses and faulty priorities lie.
3. Important interpretations to have when we face difficulties: 1) the difficulties have a purpose to help us mature and become Christ-like; 2) the difficulty is really a battle between our "new man" and our "old man"; 3) our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18)

SESSION 6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. God wants and needs to expose our hearts because our hearts are deceptive; we tend to overlook or minimize our own sin; the idols of our heart are dangerous--especially those that fit in with our normal, everyday lives.
2. The hidden, unobservable, idols of our hearts are a danger because they lead us to respond in fear and/or anger because they rule our emotions and reason instead of responding in faith and on biblical principles.
3. We, as Christians, mourn because of the presence and consequences of sin; we celebrate because God is for us and gives us grace.

SESSION 7

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Our physical aging can become an idol; we can idolize and obsess over youth and physical appearance to the detriment of our spiritual condition.
2. Regret, as a good thing, is a way for us to be aware that something is wrong; that something needs to be changed or a problem addressed; when it reminds us that we are in need of God's grace and mercy. As a bad thing it can cause us to be depressed and make us question whether it was worth it, when it makes us trust or try to create our own righteousness.
3. Our dreams have a tendency to raise in us a desire for control. Because we want to fulfill our dreams, we have a picture in our minds of how it "should be" and we pursue it.
4. Being honest with God means we can share with God what we are thinking or feeling and what we are struggling with; what we are trying to hide or pretend is not difficult. Judging God means we accuse him of doing wrong or we accuse him of not knowing what is best for us.

SESSION 8

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Our unwillingness to be open and honest about our struggles is damaging to ourselves and to God's kingdom because: 1) we are living and practicing lies; 2) we discourage others from feeling free to be open and honest; 3) we limit our ability to help each other and to receive grace; 4) we limit our opportunities to reveal God's grace and salvation to others.
2. Physical aging, regret, and the death of our dreams are tools of God's grace because they cause us to see our frailty and need of him; they are designed to cause us to submit to God's will and allow him to be Lord.
3. God's Word, although it does not always provide guidance for the specific issues of everyday life, helps us in the struggles of life by providing a worldview and a perspective so that we can properly interpret life's struggles; it acts as a mirror for us to examine our own hearts; it exposes the thoughts and motives of our hearts; it properly diagnoses our problem and provides the cure.

SESSION 9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The purpose of the Bible is to inform us of who God is, what he is doing, and what he desires, so that we are transformed in how we live and think and so we would live to bring those truths to the lives of others.
2. One part of understanding suffering is that we can expect to suffer and be prepared for it so that we do not become angry about it and so we can grow through it and allow God to use and learn from it so we can help others who suffer.
3. One aspect of understanding God's sovereignty helps us accept our own limits and be at peace because God is in control.
4. Understanding that we were created by God, for instance, informs us how we live and respond to God in suffering; we can have hope knowing we are God's children.
5. Understanding that everything we do and say is an act of worship means our lives and responses are acts of worship to God—including our responses to trials and suffering.
6. Understanding eternity brings hope knowing there will be an end to suffering, that this life is temporary and there is a greater life coming; knowledge of eternity guides us to value what is eternal.

SESSION 10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Refining grace is what God does to shape us into the image of Christ; it is a process that involves hardship and suffering because God is reconstructing and disciplining us—to achieve what we cannot do on our own. God's refining grace involves God's patience, mercy, faithfulness, and love because he does not give up on us and wants better for us.
2. "True righteousness only ever begins when I come to the end of myself" means God is working to make us righteous and therefore brings situations into our lives that will bring us to the end of ourselves—to a place where we will see our faults, weaknesses and frailties; where we will begin to seek his help and allow his control. Where we seek his righteousness we will submit to his will, we will identify our idols and worship only him.