

# Danger of the Middle Years

by G.B. Duncan

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*The middle years of life are a time of great potential and opportunity, but they are also a time of distinctive, deceptive, and destructive dangers that can be avoided by dwelling in the secret place of the Most High and trusting in the Lord's promise to renew our strength.*

**Duration:** 29:43

**Scripture:** Psalm 91:5-6, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:31, Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:13

**Topics:** "Complacency"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of dwelling in a secret place with God, which is the most high. By doing so, one can experience renewal of strength and the ability to overcome challenges. The speaker also highlights the significance of the middle years of life and the potential loss if one fails to fulfill their purpose during this time. The sermon references Psalm 91 and Isaiah 40:31 to emphasize the security and strength that comes from a close relationship with God.

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## Transcript

O God, our Father, as we turn now to thy holy word, it is with a prayer in our hearts that we may experience once again, as we have so often experienced, thy faithfulness to the promise of thy Son concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that he will guide us into all truth. May he be our teacher now, taking our minds and thinking through them thy force, taking my lips and speaking through them thy word, taking our hearts and our wills and inclining them in obedience to thy truth. And this we ask for Christ our Saviour's sake.

You'll find the words upon which I want to base our thinking this morning in the 91st Psalm, the psalm that we read together earlier on, taking a phrase at the beginning of verse five and linking it up with a phrase that comes at the end of verse six. Thou shalt not be afraid for, verse six, the destruction that wasteth at noonday. One of the amazing things about the psalms is the way in which suddenly, reading through them, we find one or another aspect of our spiritual experience suddenly brought into the sharpest and most brilliant of focus.

And here in the sixth verse of this 91st Psalm, we get an example of where the psalmist speaks of the destruction that wasteth at noonday. And behind the poetry and imagery and imagination that these words contain, creatures have always sensed a flashing and a warning light. So what is the psalmist referring to? The destruction that wasteth at noonday.

And the verdict of many is that the noonday of the psalm refers to the midday of the soul, to that part of life that is found midway between the dawning of life at birth and the closing of life on earth at death. The dangers of what we might call the middle years, the destruction that wasteth at noonday. The dangers not of youth, nor the dangers of old age, but the dangers of what we call middle age.

Are there then factors in life that constitute a threat to our spiritual well-being in the middle years of life? I realize of course that a definition of middle age is not only a difficult and delicate business, but also a dangerous affair. I always remember hearing of an old godly minister warning his assistant. They had visited an elderly lady and the senior minister asked the young man to lead in prayer.

And during the prayer he referred to the elderly lady as, thine aged servant. When they got out of the house and were walking along the road, the older minister said, I want to give you a piece of advice. And that is, when you are praying, never refer under any circumstances to the age of the lady for whom you are praying.

The lord may forgive you, but she never will. And the assistant minister recalling the incident said, and that lady was ninety years old. But what are the years of middle age? If we take the biblically fixed span of life as three score years and ten, then it comes with a sense of shock that thirty-five stands exactly halfway between the beginning and the end of life.

And the middle years of a life would seemingly lie on either side of that halfway mark. But we live longer nowadays, I suppose, and maybe we stay younger longer than in bible days. Most people would like to think that they were young, still, right up to thirty-five.

But in all honesty we cannot claim youth much beyond. The earlier years of life may fairly be taken to cover our days until we reach the thirty-five mark. And then we must surely be moving into the middle years, say until fifty-five or sixty be reached.

And then, and I'm beyond that stage now, we surely move into the latter and older years, the closing years, which may be longer or shorter as the providence of God determines, before our life on earth reaches its close. So I'm not going to define the middle years precisely in case somebody is upset and asks for their lines and leaves the church. But what about these middle years? We must be middle-aged sometimes.

And some of us, whether we like it or not, are either entering those years or in them right now. The danger of the middle years, for the psalmist calls the destruction that wastes at noonday. As I pondered over this line of thought, I realized in the first place that the dangers of the middle years would of course be distinctive.

They would be different, different from those I face in my younger days, different from those that I would expect to meet in the latter days, the days of old age. In becoming alert to the dangers of the middle years, I would have to keep in balance two facets of experience at that time. And the first has to do with the kind of person I have now become.

When I enter the middle years of life, I've passed the formative years. My life has usually settled into a mold of my own choosing. If I'm single, then that will be the mold of the profession or work of my choice, with other interests that can be included, finding their allotted place in the schedule of my weekly program.

I've become very largely a person of certain habits, with certain pursuits and interests. And a slight element of rigidity has maybe now entered into my life. A rigidity that usually doesn't like being unduly disturbed.

If I'm married, then the middle years are usually the years of maximum responsibility. I have a home to keep, I have a family to rear. And these combine usually to demand most of my time, both during and outwith my working hours.

And I find that while life is immeasurably enriched in certain areas, it tends to become impoverished in others. I have neither the time, nor the money, nor the strength to cope with anything more beyond the immediate and demanding responsibilities of my home and my work, which are so closely linked together. How different all this is from the younger years of my life.

I have to take into my reckoning the kind of person I have now become. Herein lies a contributive factor which makes the dangers of the middle years of life distinctive. The kind of person I have now become, and this suggests also the kind of perils I must now resist.

The first peril that came to me was that of contentment, or becoming content with what I have included in my life, when there is still so much more in life waiting to be enjoyed, waiting to be explored. Take just one example. Take what I know of my Bible.

By the time I reach the middle years, if I've been a Christian for any length of time, I'm in danger of being content with what knowledge of the Word of God I have accumulated. And all the time there is so much more awaiting me. If I'm not a Christian, just a content with that, and not realizing the incredible new world of spiritual reality that is just one step away.

But I'm content with the familiar world I've built around myself, and I'm settling down. The other peril I think is that of early retirement, and I don't mean from a job. The peril of withdrawing myself from so much, when responsibilities are becoming demanding and absorbing.

If I'm not careful, I begin to pull out of other things, to give all my time to meet these responsibilities. I have so little time for the friends I used to meet, so little time for the hobbies I used to enjoy, for the church work I used to do, maybe even for the Bible I used to read. I've got so much on my hands, my responsibilities are so urgent, my home and my job.

The peril is that I, I'm beginning to retire. The dangers of the middle years are distinctive, they're different. Because of the kind of person I have now become, and because of the kind of perils I must now resist, the destruction that wasteth at noontide.

The dangers of the middle years of life are also deceptive. The whole context in which our text is found is littered with imagery which speaks of danger to life. There's a beat of wings, there's a clash of battle, but here the imagery is that of sickness and disease.

And so often disease is deceptive, and that in two ways. Deceptive first of all concerning its presence. The presence of a disease can remain undetected.

We just don't know that we've got it. In Hosea chapter 7 verse 9, there's a verse which describes the condition of Israel as being like that of a person who is reaching the middle years. God describes Ephraim as one concerning whom gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not.

Some of you ladies remember the first time you spotted a gray hair? Suddenly an indication that you weren't quite so young as you used to, though some folk turned gray very early, and some either naturally or artificially never seemed to turn gray at all. The dangers of the middle years can so easily remain undetected because there is nothing obviously wrong. Because the danger of the disease belongs not so much to what we call sins of commission, things that we do which are wrong.

We may be doing nothing wrong, but to what we call sins of omission. We are failing to do things that are right. And here there's not the clamor and noise of battle, but the hidden, silent, unseen, undetected presence of a disease.

Just as a person can appear to be perfectly well and yet be suffering from a disease the effects of which are not yet apparent so spiritually, things can be far from what they ought to be in the middle years. And yet the person involved may be almost unaware of what is happening, and the observer be even less aware. You see there's so much commendable, highly commendable about the way of life I'm living.

I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm living a decent, good, Christian life, but there is something wrong. And the dangers of the middle years are deceptive.

Like a disease, because its presence is undetected and because its progress is unsuspected, disease can be progressive. Sometimes it can go on a long time and go a long way before it becomes manifest. And the destruction that wasteth at noonday is like that.

The very word wasteth is significant. Here is a condition that speaks of a progressive weakening of the strength, of the power, of the ability that once were there. Something gradual.

Here is something that is just unsuspected, undetected, and it's weakening, it's wasting away the health and the strength. How subtle it all is. If sin and failure were to come to us blatant and obvious, we would recognize it right away for what it is, and we would reject it.

If the appeal was to commit some kind of transgression that was obviously and fragrantly wrong, we would turn it down. But if the approach of the tempter was different, if the suggestion was simply that the time had come to rest on our laurels, to ease up, to look around at the life we're living and be quite content to settle down. If the temptation was to drop just one or two of the things we used to do, and not to fill their places with other things, different things, but things of equal spiritual significance, that would be different.

Nobody could blame us for that. Nobody could point the finger of accusation and say, look, the dangers of the middle years of life are deceptive, because the presence can remain undetected, the progress unsuspected, and all the time something at the very, very center of our spiritual health is wasting away. So the dangers of the middle years of life are distinctive, they're deceptive.

And finally, the dangers of the middle years of life can be destructive. Our text speaks of the destruction that wastes us at noonday. And the dangers of the middle years of life are dangers which threaten to destroy the richest years.

The years of greatest potential, the very best years, are the middle years. We don't want to get angry because we're getting old. Some people fight against it.

They don't want to get old. They want to remain young. But the middle years are the richest.

They're the best. Just because of that, if they're destroyed, then the severity of the loss is incalculable. The middle years are the years of the maximum possibilities.

That's the time when I've got beyond the foolish blunderings of youth. Youth has its unspeakable advantages of energy, of enthusiasm, of decision, of a life normally unspoiled, stretching ahead. But there's one thing that youth just cannot have, never has, and that is experience.

And the result is that youth is the time when mistakes are made, blunders are made, some of them with greater effect, some with lesser effect. In the middle years then I've got away from the foolish blunderings of youth, and I haven't yet reached the weariness of old age, when I just cannot do what I would like to do. The physical resources are not there.

The middle years are the best. Because of the contribution I can make to the service of God will be marked with insights that have been gained through experience. Insights that youth hasn't got because of the leadership for which youth unconsciously yearns can be mine.

If I'm prepared to fit it into my program, youth is seldom willing to be led by youth. More rarely, very occasionally, youth is prepared to be led by old age. But youth will still be led by those who are still in touch with them, those whose years have not as yet taken them too far beyond.

The hazards, the emotions, the longings, the ambitions that fill the awakening hours and years of life. How severe the loss if I fail to do the work I'm now better able to do than ever before. How severe the loss if I fail to give the lead I'm now better able to give than ever before.

The severity of the loss incalculable. If the middle years are lost, if the destruction that wasters at noonday drains my strength when I should be my strength. To lose what the middle years hold and what they offer is the severest loss of all.

What destruction is this? The destruction that wasters at noonday. The severity of the loss incalculable. The security in the Lord inexhaustible.

The whole thrust of this psalm is that of confidence in the face of this danger. The whole of this psalm centers around the fact that he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. And I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress and my God.

In him I like trust. Surely he shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler. And so thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flyeth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasters at noonday.

Where does the security lie? How can I face this danger of the middle years with confidence? The security lies in the closeness of my walk with my God because of all that he keeps on meaning to me as I dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Then I can face the dangers of the middle years without fear. Thou shalt not be afraid.

How these opening verses recall the words in Isaiah 40, 31 day that waiteth when the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They shall walk and not faint. Those that wait in the Lord. If there's ever a time in life when you need to keep in touch with your God, it's in the middle years.

I have one vivid memory that lingers in my mind after reading General Eisenhower's book *Crusade in Europe*. A story of the victorious half, the triumphant half of the second world war. When the second front as it was called was about to be opened, when General Eisenhower was appointed commander-in-chief of the United Forces.

And the new word came into my vocabulary. It just shows how ignorant I was when he brings out that the importance in warfare is not the importance of strategy, but of logistics. I'd never heard of logistics.

I looked up my dictionary to find out what logistics are. Logistics are defined in my dictionary as that branch of military science relating to the movement and supplying of armies. In other words, it's never enough to plan your strategy.

You must provide for it. Logistics mean that when you have formed your strategy, that you then make it possible by planning your supplies for the strategy to be implemented. A constant supply of all needed equipment must be guaranteed.

The logistics in the spiritual warfare are never so important as during the middle years. Those middle years, may I say to all of you who passed the 35 mark, those middle years of your life are spiritually the most potential, the most tremendous, the richest, the best years of your life. And just because they're that, the enemy will do his utmost to see that your life is subjected to the pressures of the destruction that wastes us at noonday.

So that all that accumulation of experience through your mistakes and through your early service, all the lessons you've learned that are now there, ready to be applied to life, and as a result of that to lead others, your own family to begin with maybe, the young people you influence, who are looking to you, all that to be wasted by an insidious disease that will weaken your strength at the time you should be strongest. What's the answer? Well, it lies in the area not of strategy but of logistics. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

How often those are the very years when the Bible gets crowded out and prayer and communion with God become empty. We're so busy looking after the bairns, and what a fantastic job that is, that we've got no time for the Lord. We used to spend time with our Bibles, we used to read it meaningfully and prayerfully.

We've stopped that, but there's no need. There's no need to be afraid of the dangers of the middle years, says the Word of God. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, he need not be afraid for the destruction that wastes us at noonday.

There was one basic difference between World War I and World War II. The difference can be seen in the war memorials throughout our land. There was a tremendous difference in the casualty numbers.

World War I exacted a heavy toll. World War II exacted its own toll too, but not as heavy. And the difference wasn't just one of strategy, it was in the area of logistics.

Montgomery never moved his troops into action until he was absolutely certain that he got all that he needed, not only to win the battle, but to push on. We never moved until we were ready to move, and when we moved, we moved in power. And I would say to those who are in the middle years, you're in the best years of life, the very best.

For me, those middle years have gone. They'll never come back. I can never have them again.

They've gone. For some of you, they've not come. They will come.

But to those who are in the middle years of life, remember there is a destruction that wastes us at noonday. There's a danger that is distinctive to your time of life. There's a danger that's deceptive.

There's a danger that's destructive. The very best can be destroyed. There's no need for it to be destroyed.

If you want to make the best in what you can give and in how you can lead, then dwell in the secret place, for the most high, as you've never dwelt before. He will renew your strength, and you will mount up with wings as eagles. You will run and not be weary.

You will walk and not faint. You'll find that the middle years are indeed the best. Let us sing as we close our morning act of worship.

423, O Jesus King most wonderful, Thou Conqueror renowned. 423. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon us and remain with us this day and forevermore.

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