

Man Talk: What is a mid-life crisis?

Written by Timothy Houston
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This week I attended a motorcycle safety course. This was my last step before purchasing a motorcycle. Because my first attempt of owning and riding a motorcycle is taking place after turning 50, the question of a mid-life crisis has come up over and over. Despite my pleas that this desire comes more from the fact that I am at a time and place emotionally and financially to purchase one, friends and family alike believe this is caused by my mid-life crisis. Rather than continue to dispel the notion, I decided to research it and see if I could gain some insight.

What is a mid-life crisis? When does it begin? A midlife crisis might occur anywhere from about age 37 through the 50. By whatever term, the crisis or transition tends to occur around significant life events, such as your youngest child finishing college, or a "zero" birthday announcing to the world that you're entering a new decade. The mid life transition is far more than a handful of physical changes. It often brings a re-ordering of priorities, a change in values, deep soul-searching about the meaning of life, the facing of your own mortality, and a loss of social power.

For most men, the idea of going through any crisis is something that they would not subscribe to. This idea offends a man's ego and attacks his vitality on many levels. The belief that half way through a man's life, he is going to fall apart or regress back to boyhood is nonsense to most men. According to a Washington Post article, academic research since the 1980s rejects the notion of midlife crisis as a phase that most adults go through. In one study, fewer than 10% of people in the United States had psychological crises due to their age.

So although mid-life crisis do exist, less than 10% of men experience it. For those men who may be experiencing it, here are some symptoms: insomnia, fatigue, despair, morbidity, inability to concentrate, ruefulness about roads not taken, dread that life holds no more surprises, regrets, or a sharp longing for something. Men in crisis often obsess about big questions, as in, "Does my life matter?" These men start to think in terms of how little time they have left." In severe cases, some fantasize about just lighting out, casting off their old lives and starting over. Because of the long term consequences of these symptoms, any man experiencing them should seek qualified professional help. You may be in the 10% and not know it.

For those of us in the 90%, we should continue to evaluate ourselves. Our goal should be to come through middle life as better men. Because of our life experiences, we should be wiser, calmer, stronger of spirit, and even more attractive than ever. The touch of gray in our hair, and the passion of life in our hearts will speak volumes about our journey through life. We should never allow our age to define or limit us. Middle age is truly a time to live life and not dread it.

To all my family and friends concerned about my mid life, thank you for your concern. I am not going through a mid-life crisis. Know that I am the best man that I could ever be, and as a ride my motorcycle with the wind blowing over my balding head, I will be smiling as I live the best life possible.

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. For questions, comments or more

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