



We need new terminology to describe the age range between young adulthood and old age. Middle-aged just doesn't cut it. It's describing something by what it is not. It's not the beginning... it's not the end... it's just...the middle (...yawn). It's time to give these years the credit they are due. They are a total roller-coaster and a missionary adventure.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, middle-aged refers to "The period between early adulthood and old age, usually considered as the years from about 45 to 65."

I turned 44 this week, and I am now four years into my favorite decade of my life. Seriously! I LOVE being in my 40s! I LOVE being over the insecure worldliness of my 20s and the anxious striving of my 30s. **I love knowing who I am, loving who I am, and having the confidence to give bravely from my experience and my core identity. These have all been 40's developments for me.**

Looking forward at my friends who are in their 50s I see GRACIOUSNESS. Like, Grace Kelly/Audrey Hepburn style class and love. Hearts that make people smile just by being near them. I want to love with the free and kind generosity I see my 50 something friends embracing. Think about the people you know who are the most confident, kind, gracious and generous... I'll bet a bunch of them are in their 50s.

Do I mind not looking 25? Not really. Vanity has proven itself to be a liar in my life, and I am much happier being a healthy 44-year-old who looks her age. Am I redefining beauty to suit my circumstances? No, just understanding what true beauty actually is. Beauty

doesn't get old and worn out. Beauty is ageless. Beauty is God, ever ancient, ever new. Objects get worn out. By our mid-40s we should stop seeing people as objects whose sole purpose is to look good. We should stop seeing ourselves as objects whose sole purpose is to look good. This is precisely one of those 40s life lessons that I love and try to share with my anxious, striving 30-something friends.

The best parts of who I am have come with me into this decade – my faith, my family, my experiences, and my friends. My wounds and my mistakes (... we all have a good repertoire of them by now...) have come with me too, but not as the specters hovering over me that they were in the past; now they are sacred to me, they are the places I have met Christ most profoundly. They became the doors he entered to take up his home in my soul. They have made me more loving, more compassionate, more realistic.

At 44, working full-time in a career and mission that I love, with 6 kids and a Chinese international student “daughter” who is living with us for three years, I am busier than I've ever been. **Christ has asked me to give up a lot of my own plans and interests and instead focus on him in the people and work he has put in front of me.** It's been hard, but so good for me. I think I understand Mary so much more. I always wondered why there was so little written of her life in the Gospel... she is the Queen of Apostles and mother of the missionary Church... but we hear nothing of what she did. Now, I think I get it... Mary's life, like the mission many of us have in these “middle years,” was not her own. Mary never stopped giving, loving, bringing people to her son – but not to pursue her own plans, goals, projects, and accomplishments. She just served Him, in the people he put in her path, in his life and ministry. It was never about her...

I think that's what scares people about being “middle-aged”... it's no longer about you. “You serving you” has not made you happy, and you come face-to-face with that realization. You're not on a pedestal for your age or appearance anymore. You aren't fulfilled by striving to prove yourself the way you felt you needed to before. In these years, you are called to be and to give... to love and serve others in new ways, hard ways, hidden ways, necessary ways. It's so awesome. You get to be the foundation your kids launch from, the comfort others need, the support people can turn to, the faithful friend they can walk with. **You really become a gift of self. Your life is missionary in a new and complete way.**

These are the 'gift of self' years, after the romantic notions of what love means have been brought into the light of reality, and the selfishness in them has either been cleft away or has taken over. Christ turns to us in our 40s and invites us to follow him like he invited the rich young man (Mt 19:16-22), but this time, he asks us to be willing to give up not our wealth, but our selfishness. Will I give up myself, the worldly and ego-centric illusions of self-fulfillment that drew me in my 30s, give all I am to the poor and follow him? The poor are many... our spouses, our family, our friends, our coworkers, a sea of people drowning in a broken culture and in desperate need of soul-saving love.

Looking around at others in my generation, I see what happens when we say yes and embrace this, stepping off our securities and going into the deep with him. And I see what happens when we don't, when 40-somethings cling to their restless selfishness, missing the real fulfillment that can be ours when we are willing to give up our egos and die to self.

That, my friends, is where the real adventure starts. After four or five decades, we can experience life in brand new ways, challenging and fulfilling ways that are actually way more awesome than the goals we were striving for in our earlier years. We can give as we never have before, pour ourselves out in mature love that is able to leave self behind, be freely creative because we can get our egos out of the way, take chances because we've learned that Christ is in every storm. This is when anything becomes possible. **Christ's plans and projects that our selfishness and vanity once hindered are unlocked, and he can do anything.**

So many saints lived the defining and pinnacle years of their missions with holy boldness in their 40s and 50s... The Apostles after Pentecost, St. Paul, St. Bridget, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Padre Pio, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. John Paul II, to name a handful. The middle-aged years are missionary years, and it's no coincidence that we are missionaries living in this very time. **God has led us for 40+ years; time to leave the desert of selfishness and enter the promised land of self-giving in new ways. So awesome. Let's make the most of it!!!**