



# Study Three

## The Middle Years

From the ending of teenage years to whatever your definition of 'Senior' might be!



Roland Vivian Pitchforth, *Snack Time in a Factory*, 1941

*'Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.'* (Proverbs 4:6)



### a) Characteristics

(Read Leviticus 27:1-8; Luke 3:21-23a; Hebrews 5:7-14)

The reading from Leviticus is shrouded in mystery, as we know little of the fine detail of dedicating things or persons to the Lord via a special vow. We are told that Hannah vowed to give a first-born son to the Lord in thankfulness for a miraculous birth (1 Sam 1:11), but here it is an offering of the monetary value, rather than an object or person.

Here, the most 'valuable years' for both male and female seem to be between twenty to sixty, perhaps a reflection of the working life or the slave market value.

Luke gives Jesus' age as 'about thirty' when his ministry began, heralded by the moment he asked John the Baptist to baptize him and God declared, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you, I am well pleased.'

The author of Hebrews clarifies what he is looking for in those in authority, which is maturity of thought and faith, rather than the complacency that has led some of his readers to lose interest and put themselves in danger of being led astray. They had been Christians for quite some time and ought to have made more progress in the faith than currently they had. Their immaturity troubles the writer, hence the reference to milk and solid food!

SAMPLE

### On the surface...

Does an image, verse or phrase stand out, and what does it say to you?



### Digging deeper...

Q) Are some people valued more highly in society than others and if so, who, and why?

Q) Why do think Jesus' ministry didn't begin a decade earlier, considering his level of understanding when in the temple at Jerusalem aged just twelve?

Q) Leaving the teenage years behind, what qualities might suggest a growth in maturity?



## b) Responsibilities

(Read Proverbs 4:1-6; Acts 7:20-33; Numbers 8:23-26)

We may not remember too many words of wisdom or instruction from parents/guardians or 'older' folk as we were growing up, but Proverbs reminds us that such instruction, handed down the generations, can indeed be both useful and welcomed by those starting out on life's adventure in the world. The teaching referred to in the reading is traditional, lovingly handed down, and 'sons' might suggest the father here is a teacher, or simply that the teacher-pupil relationship is based on a parent-child model.

Moses had an eventful beginning to his life, brought up and educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians, but his upbringing and education would help in the task that awaited him in the future. There comes a day when it seemed right for him to visit his own people. This does not go quite as he planned, however, and it is some years later that Moses gets his call from God to help set the Israelites free from exile in Egypt.

The mandatory starting age for the service of a Levite (descendants of Levi and caretakers of the Temple) ranged from twenty to thirty years, as times, circumstances, and workload changed. After a Levite had reached the mandatory retirement age of fifty, he was still free to assist his younger coworkers if physically able to do so.

### On the surface...

Does an image, verse or phrase stand out, and what does it say to you?



### Digging deeper...

Q) How important is trying to be an excellent role model for the next generation, and is that easier or harder than it used to be?

Q) How easy is it for impatience to influence our assessment of the 'right time' to do something, and is patience a good virtue at these times?

Q) How do you view God's instruction to Moses regarding working arrangements, bearing in mind that in the Old Testament, the average lifespan appears far higher than in Jesus' day?



## c) Temptations

(Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-5,11-12; 2 Samuel 11:1-4; Luke 12:16-19)

Writing to the Christians in and around Corinth, Paul reminds them of their own history, and suggests that they remember its lessons, for complacency was a big issue in Israel's relationship with God, with them punished for slipping into idolatry or immoral activities. Remember this, says Paul, and don't slide down the same path of temptation yourself as time goes on. However, if you do, then God will not have forgotten you, and provides a way out should you wish to use it.



The Third Estate carrying the Clergy and the Nobility on its back

The story of David shows not only the danger of temptation, but what it might lead to. It was expected that a King would lead his army into battle, which David had frequently done, but this time he chooses the quiet life, a choice that would have been considered somewhat reprehensible, particularly seen alongside his sexual liaison with Bathsheba, followed by the 'arranged' death of her husband in battle.

In the parable of the rich fool, it is worldly distractions that are the issue, often an issue where someone has more than enough resources to live by and gets distracted on their spiritual journey. 'Eat, drink, and be merry' might seem like the perfect life at a moment in time, but is often a slippery path to walk. The issue in Jesus' parable of the rich fool is not so much wealth, but our attitude to making and using it.

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### On the surface...

Does an image, verse or phrase stand out, and what does it say to you?

### Digging deeper...



Q) Should we as a nation remember the lessons of the past as we plan for the actions of tomorrow, and can you think of any lessons that might be relevant at the moment?

Q) David's story is not a good one, but how easy is it for poor decisions to escalate, and do you have any sympathy for the king?

Q) 'Eat, drink, and be merry!' is a great catchphrase but can you think of an alternative one, on a theme of enjoyment, for a Christian?



What makes Superman a hero is not that he has power, but that he has the wisdom and the maturity to use the power wisely. From an acting point of view, that's how I approached the part. (Christopher Reeve)

Thirty was so strange for me. I've really had to come to terms with the fact that I am now a walking and talking adult. (C. S. Lewis)



## Praying together : Lectio divina

The traditional practice of Lectio Divina in Western Christianity involves reading, meditating, and praying with scripture to foster a closer relationship with God and gain a deeper understanding of His teachings. The pattern below is a simplified version using some verses from this study and can be used individually or within a group.

### Lectio - Reading

Read twice, slowly and attentively, listening for the 'gentle whisper' that is God's word or phrase for today, using this or alternative verses.

*'Listen, my son, accept what I say,  
and the years of your life will be many.  
I instruct you in the way of wisdom  
and lead you along straight paths.  
When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;  
when you run, you will not stumble.  
Hold on to instruction, do not let it go;  
guard it well, for it is your life.'*  
(Proverbs 4:10-13)

### Meditatio – Meditation (2-3 min)

As we think of those who first heard these words, and repeat them silently in our own minds, let them interact with our day, our thoughts and concerns... God's word becomes our word for today.

(Group – allow time for those who wish to share the word, image or phrase that has touched their heart.)

### Oratio - Prayer

As we turn to prayer, so God invites us to respond to the word or phrase that has spoken to us. In the quietness or aloud we bring to Him those words, images or people that God has placed on our hearts, and how we might put those words into action.

(Group – allow time if possible for all who wish to share that which is on their hearts for prayer.)

### Contemplatio – Contemplation

We spend a minute or two in silence, enjoying the experience of God's presence and love embracing us.

Glory to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
Three in One. Amen.