

# The Meaning of Midlife

by Ray Hemachandra



Midlife brings serious challenges,  
Marianne Williamson says, but also the  
opportunity to deepen your sense of  
self, purpose, and spirituality.

# “What is it about spiritual knowledge that takes so long to digest?...

*It takes a decade to understand the basic nature of spiritual principles, another decade while the ego tries to eat you alive, another decade while you try to wrestle it to the ground, and finally you begin to walk more or less in the light. Anyone who thinks a spiritual path is easy, probably hasn't been walking one.”*

Marianne Williamson, *The Age of Miracles*

What makes Marianne Williamson such a popular author and teacher goes beyond her intelligence and constant ability to achieve deep, perspective-changing insights: the raw openness and honesty of her reflections about her own life path have inspired spiritual seekers for decades.

Through her books such as *A Return to Love*, *Everyday Grace*, *Enchanted Love*, *Healing the Soul of America*, and *The Gift of Change*; her work as president of the board of directors of The Peace Alliance, a grassroots organization that advocates for the creation of a U.S. Department of Peace; her XM radio show as part of the *Oprah and Friends* block of programming; her good works, including the founding of Project Angel Food, a Los Angeles meals-on-wheels program serving people affected by AIDS and other illnesses; and seminars and workshops she's held around the world, Marianne has profoundly affected the lives of countless people.

When she approached and turned fifty, and the realities of modern midlife set in, Marianne wrote *The Age of Miracles: Embracing the New Midlife*, a best-selling 2008 title in which she reflects on the midlife of the Baby Boomer generation; shares her own struggles with, and new understandings about, midlife; and redefines what the second half of life can be with a passionate call for a shift in perception about personal and generational opportunity and responsibility. Learn more about her at [www.marianne.com](http://www.marianne.com).

**Ray Hemachandra:** *How has your relationship to God, and perspective about God, changed and matured as you've entered midlife and faced midlife issues?*

**Marianne Williamson:** I don't think it's changed, but the more mature we are, the more receptive we are. It's like every year you go to the same Easter service or every year you go to the same Passover seder. The story of Easter doesn't change and the story of the Passover doesn't change, but you go year after year

because *you* change.

If you allow yourself to deepen with midlife, your experience of everything deepens, including your experience of God.

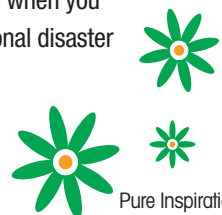
The same truths that you understood and that affected you last year, you can receive at a deeper level this year because you've experienced more of life. That's how it has been for me: the religious stories, the religious truths, the spiritual principles—obviously, they don't change. But as you get older and you experience more, you recognize the applicability, the profundity, and the fundamental truths of spiritual principles in ways that you couldn't when you simply were living a less dimensional life.

**Ray:** *Has it gotten any easier? Or do you still grapple with spiritual understandings?*

**Marianne:** I don't think of spiritual principle as a struggle. I think of life lived without spiritual principles as a struggle.

As you get older, life gets harder if you're not applying spiritual truths. Also, as you get older, you have more and more layers of experience to forgive, more layers of heartbreak, more layers of what you might think of as failure. Once you get to your forties or fifties in this society, very few people haven't had at least one body blow—financial, bankruptcy, divorce, relationship disaster, addiction, trouble with a child, trouble with a parent. Most people take some blow.

So, living in this world, under the dominance of the ego mind, is difficult. That's the struggle. But the point of life is not who falls down. The point is who gets up and how you do it. To me, that's the important issue about spiritual principle: that you recognize it as both that which saves you from the self-sabotaging mind and that which heals you and lifts you up when you succumb to it and attract whatever personal disaster you attract.



“The miracle is when you realize the time of physical decline can be a time of spiritual incline.”



**Ray:** You call midlife “the age of miracles.” Does realizing the miracles require conscious choice?

**Marianne:** A miracle is a shift in perception. If you allow your perceptions to be dominated by a status-quo perspective—you hold thought forms like: over the hill, too old, he or she won’t want me anymore, they won’t hire me anymore, I blew it, and it’s too late for me now—these thought forms create a network of status-quo mental habit patterns.

The miracle is when you shift. The miracle is when you know there is no hill—you’re removing the hill. The miracle is when you realize the time of physical decline can be a time of spiritual incline. King Solomon said his youth was the time of his winter, and his more mature years were the time of his summer.

When you understand the law of divine compensation, you realize that in the presence of spiritual consciousness, there is more than enough compensation for any diminishment in materiality. So, the miracle is that you consciously change your thinking. You realize that, as it says in *A Course in Miracles*, if you identify more with your spirit than with your body, then you are living in a zone of eternal renewal—an infinite well-spring of new beginnings and breakthroughs that are limited by *nothing*, and certainly not by the fact that you are older than you used to be.

When you realize that the real breakthroughs come from levels of higher consciousness, then you also realize that the achievement of maturity and wisdom is the most powerful generator of new beginnings possible.

**Ray:** Are these realizations any different for the generation in midlife today from previous ones?

**Marianne:** I don’t know if they’re different. I’m not a member of a previous generation, so I can’t really say what it was for them. But I do think that every generation has its unique story.

Our story has to do, among other things, with the fact that we experienced a prolonged post-adolescence. For many reasons, we failed to get on with it the way our parents had.

We remained in certain zones of immaturity longer than we might have. So, we get to a certain age and look back, sometimes with shame and horror, at ways that we did not live life as responsibly as we might have. That motivates us with a sense of urgency, in some ways, almost to make up for lost time: “I wasn’t responsible in the 1980s, so I want to be responsible now”; “I wasn’t mature in the ’70s or ’90s, so I want to be mature now.”

I think every soul longs to get it right before they die.

It’s a craving of the soul to feel that on some level you at least tried to do what you came here to do, because the soul has that sense of what it came here to do. As it says in the Jewish book of prayer, nobody wants to die feeling that they have not sung their song.

For the Baby Boomer generation—those of us raised in the ’60s—there was a special mark on our foreheads. We were the generation that was going to make things better. We were going to make things right. And again, there’s a collective shame and horror, if we’re honest with ourselves, in facing the fact that under our watch—the watch of this generation that was so committed to making things right—things have gotten so much worse.

We were the generation that was going to replace guns with flowers. And in the end, no generation before ours has ever replaced so many flowers with guns.

That realization increases our sense of urgency. The big revolving door is coming back around for us one last time in terms of a major chapter. You get to a certain age, and you don’t have time for any more five-year detours—relationship aftermaths, when you realize, “Oh, that was a five-year detour,” or times when you look back and think, “That decade was stupid.” We have no time for that now. That’s a good thing, in a way, because there’s the sense that this is it.

You’ve learned what your weaknesses are. You’ve learned what your strengths are. You’ve learned from your failures as well as your successes, and there’s the sense that, okay, if you’re ever going to be able to do it, it’s now.

**Ray:** Do you mourn those lost generational opportunities, Marianne? And do you have to leave behind the regrets to move on?

**Marianne:** I don’t think that anyone can age in a conscious way and not experience grief. You’re not to wallow, but if you don’t process your regrets, then they remain emotional underground toxins. If you did something in 1975 that you deeply regret and that you now can recognize as having been profoundly irresponsible, for example, the only way to be lifted out of deep regret and the pain over it is through atonement—through the kind of remorse that leads to genuine atonement, the making of amends, and forgiveness of self and others.

You can’t remove that layer of pain by just saying, “Okay, I’m not going to wallow in it.” The only way to remove that layer of pain is to face what it says and to recognize it as the look in the mirror that it is, reflecting the things you did that you wish you hadn’t done and the things you didn’t do that you wish you *had* done.

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