Welcome to the “Love & Respect” Podcast. A conversation that changes the way you view all relationships, whether married, single, parents or professional. Discover the relationship secret hidden in plain sight. And now the intersection of theology and psychology. Conversations between pastor and psychologist—they are father and son.

Your hosts, Emerson and Jonathan Eggerichs. Are you ready? Here we go!

Jonathan: Welcome to the Love & Respect podcast. This is episode 55. I’m Jonathan Eggerichs joined by my father Emerson Eggerichs. We’re so happy you could be with us for this episode. This episode is titled “The midlife crisis of the Christian: Am I really happy with who I am as a person?” Again, “The midlife crisis of the Christian: Am I really happy with who I am as a person?”

If you haven’t had a chance to check out all our podcasts, again, a reminder LoveAndRespectPodcast.com, iTunes, Stitcher. Last week’s episode 54 was “Why does my wife want to be so close to me?” If you didn’t get a chance to listen to that please do so, or share with others. We’re always appreciative of that.

Just again, a quick reminder, I’m so grateful to those of you who have left reviews and ratings on iTunes. That’s helped the show tremendously and we are appreciative of that as that number has grown and grown. If you haven’t had a chance to do that and wanted to do something that was meaningful, I guess to us, but to others as well because the show gains traction when you do that, and you’ve benefitted from the show and wanted to give back a little bit, that certainly helps and we’d be grateful if you did so.

But without further due, why don’t we jump in to today’s episode, dad, about midlife crisis—something you’ve been writing on recently and I know you’ve written a lot more about this than we’re going to cover today. But I think that for some reason, through the collection of emails and testimonies that you’ve gotten has sparked kind of the impetus to write on this topic. Where should we begin today?

Emerson: Well, let’s listen to some of the emails that people have sent to me on this topic of the midlife crisis. And typically it’s somewhere in 45ish that that happens we say, but it can happen when you turn 30. And I’ll even make reference to some of the struggles that I went through from ages 16 to 22. So there is a crisis point and the emails that I get are sad. People are experiencing this with a spouse.

In fact, why don’t you read some of these along with me. This is the one right here. A wife writes he has moved out and was involved with someone else. “He says that he never loved me and has feelings for her. We’ve been married for 17 years with three kids. Besides that, I wonder if he is going through a midlife crisis. He no longer wants to
Jonathan: You want me to read another one? A husband wrote you, “I’m in a situation with my wife. She is going through a midlife crisis and she is not a believer. I am loving her unconditionally and not provoking or pressuring her in any way. Praise God he has diffused the situation immensely, even though she had filed for divorce.” But again, there’s that line “midlife crisis”, right?

Emerson: That’s right. Or a man says about himself, “In 2006 I was offered a position in Arizona and I went along. My wife and three children stayed in our home town in New York. Throughout my staying here in Arizona I went through a midlife crisis that separated me from my wife and I was seeking a divorce. More importantly, I lost my walk with the Lord, I was wandering literally in the desert.”

So I get these comments and such emails a lot. So what I want to do is look at this issue of the midlife crisis, what are we really addressing? And obviously we know that when we go through it is not a good thing. And you may be listening and you’re right there, I’m scratching where you’re itching, you’re struggling with this midlife point or you’re in a relationship with someone who is.

Most of us feel that this is not a very good thing, not very healthy. But we’re going to look at the fact that it can be also a very good thing. It can turn in a direction that’s extremely favorable. So we mustn’t become despairing or despondent.

Jonathan: What I might I add to that. We talk about this crisis, which suggests at this point that many people, if not most people, come to in their life, but I’m sure there’s people listening as well as we maybe talk about the dissatisfaction with somebody, maybe this perpetual dissatisfaction that somebody has just felt has been present for a long time, whether five years, ten years, fifteen years and they’ve just haven’t moved across.

It’s not a moment in time or a season they can identify, it’s just this invasive feeling of, “Am I doing anything of meaning or purpose? Or how do I take that next step in my life?” because there’s real displeasure with themselves, with others, anger at God, etc. So I don’t know if that was appropriate, dad, but that was what I was thinking about as I was reading earlier this morning what you’ve written on this recently.

Emerson: Well, I think it would be safe to say there’s a range of issues. I mean, we all kind of see the midlife guy who gets a gold chain and opens his shirt so his hair can show, he buys a Corvette, leaves the kids and is dating some blond bimbo. The whole thing is superficial.
Episode 055 - The Midlife Crisis of the Christian- Am I Really Happy With Who I Am As a Person?.mp3

[05:49] Jonathan: We’ve all seen it, but it’s also a character of something that, you know, may not be representative of what the true midlife crisis is for people. It’s not this one that we can kind of just see visibly around this, but they’re people that are hurting and going through that and they don’t act out “in that way”, but there’s a crisis nonetheless, right?

[06:13] Emerson: Well, I think to your point that you’re making there is also that on the other part of the continuum here we would say that’s kind of superficial, guys just need to grow up and it’s all about him and it’s very self-focused, very self-centered. Probably no crisis at all, he’s just wanting to do his own thing and he’s getting older and he convinces himself he needs to indulge his appetites lustfully or whatever.

[06:37] But as you point out, there is some people who have this [inner concern] of dissatisfaction with life, there is this sense of angst and concern. “Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?” It’s a deep philosophical, theological issue. It’s [self-incentive] thinking. I mean, that was part of what drove me not being raised in a Christian home. “Who am I? Why am I here? When I die, is that it? What’s the point of all this if we’re here by randomness?” The sense of despair over the thought that I’m alone in the universe and there’s no purpose to my life, there’s no meaning to my life.

[07:07] That’s a very despairing situation and that is depressing, but it can be healthy because it cause us to ask those deeper questions. And, of course, then you have someone who, let’s say, lost a 5-year old child to cancer, why God throws them into despairs? “Well, you know, where is God in all this? Does He really love me? Does He really care?”

[07:31] So, to your point, there is this continuum. And again, the person listening, we don’t know your frame of reference, but we don’t want to minimize the crisis on the one hand, which I think is what you’re bringing up. At the same time we can all agree that there is some really shallow life crises that people go through.

[07:51] Jonathan: Sure. Well, and I know that this is an expansive topic for you in terms of how you’re going to develop it, you know, moving forward. Did you want to kind of share it abroad?

Emerson: Yeah, literally those three questions. Yeah, because you already read this and you know where I’m going to go with it and what we’re going to look at today kind of set the stage.

[08:06] Jonathan: Okay. So you asked three key questions. And you say the Christian who goes through such a troubling time usually asks one of these three questions, if not all of them. And these are good questions to ask ourselves or yourself and we’re going to answer one of these today.
And those three questions are, number one, “Am I really happy with who I am as a person?” “Am I really happy with who I am as a person?” and that’s where we’re going to focus on today. But number two, “Am I really happy with who my spouse is to me?” given one is married.

Number three, “Am I really happy with who God is in my life?” Right, so these are three questions that you’re answering kind of on this midlife crisis topic and we’ll develop in blogs and in future things, but we’re going to focus on number one today.

Emerson: Right, because there can be the personal crisis, that “midlife crisis” is rooted in what I refer to as the personal crisis. There can be the marital crisis you came into that point in the relationship after 25 years. Or then there is what we could call the spiritual crisis. And these are real questions, real issues and, as we’ve said, some of them can be very superficial that we’re going to point out in this series that I’m doing. Some of them can be very sensitive and we’ll take a look at this first one as you’ve referenced.

Jonathan: Well, where do you want to be in?

Emerson: Well, I think with that very point I’m making here, you know, someone says, “Am I really happy with who I am as a person?” They’re beginning to struggle, they’re beginning to really just stop. “I’m in this treadmill of life,” but they kind of have this moment of awakening where they say, “You know what? I’m not happy. I’m not happy. I’m not happy with myself. I’m not happy with who I am.”

“I need to start really loving myself more. I really need to respect myself more. I need to have self-love. I need to have self-respect. You know what? I need to really focus on me.” And we hear that. We hear that frequently. There’s this moment, particularly here in the female arena where women are giving, giving, giving, and then all of their friends say, “You need to start focusing on you. You need to really do what’s best for you. You need to do what you need to do for you. You need to start thinking about yourself.”

And you’ll hear men say as well, “I’m not happy. I need to be happy.” And he begins to search for ways to make himself happy. “I don’t really like myself. I need to start liking myself. I really don’t respect myself. I really need to start doing something that’s going to make me feel good about myself.”

And, of course, as we’re pointing out, some of this can really be a great thing to go through because it causes us to think more deeply about what is it that causes a healthy sense of self-love, what is it that cause a healthy sense of self-respect.

We may be building our life on sand and now we realize it’s falling apart. This is a great moment to go more deeply into, “Who am I and why am I here and what’s this all
about?” At the same time, we might have a very good life and we’re about to throw it away. And many people talk about that. They just that were foolish for about a five-year run.

[11:08] Jonathan: So it sounds you’re going to kind of talk about both the good side and the bad side of this point one that “I’m not really happy with myself”? Emerson: Bingo! Jonathan: Okay.

[11:20] Emerson: Well, let’s begin on that statement, “Am I really happy with who I am as a person”. As I’m pointing out in one hand, you know, in “Fiddler on the Roof”—I love it—Tevye, the father, his daughter wants to marry the boy. “On the one hand... But then again on the one hand...” He goes back and forth with pros and cons.

[11:42] So we’re going to look... On the one hand this could be a really good solution. Really kind of thinking, “Okay, I’m not happy. I need to start loving and respecting myself. I need to focus on myself.” That’s not necessarily a bad thing. You know, at mountaineering it’s told that the person leading the group if an avalanche comes or something happens, the first thing that the leader has to do is to take care of himself. You need to focus on yourself, because if you don’t focus on yourself the others may not survive because you’re not surviving.

[12:11] On an airplane what are we told to do? Put the oxygen masks on our face first as parents, then on our children. So it’s a self-focus that at a certain point in time is not a bad thing, is not necessarily meaning that you’re self-centered because you’re focusing on yourself.


Emerson: That’s correct. That’s correct. Can be, but not necessarily. And even though I didn’t go through a “midlife crisis” age-wise, because I wasn’t raised in a Christian home as we referenced, for me my struggle in myself was, “I don’t really like who I am.”

[12:44] And it’s interesting. When I came to Christ at age 16 everything was really turning favorable in my life. I had lost some weight. I was kind of wore husky pants and I was always struggling with weight from like 3rd grade to 8th grade. And I was always chubby. I struggled with that.

[13:02] And even into my freshman year in military school—from 8th grade to 12th grade I went to Missouri Military Academy. But that summer between my freshman and sophomore year I lost that weight, I swam competitively and I really got athletic. I came back I think, if I remember right, I was elected class president. I lettered in all three sports. We were
There was this great moment. I was ranked number one, number two among the cadets and my peers of that age group. I mean, everything was going well. I was getting awards. Everything. But apparently there was something very absent in my heart and soul because that’s when the Billy Graham film came to the area and I was invited to go watch this movie called “For Pete’s Sake”.

And there I learned that God loved, that Christ died for me. And I received Jesus Christ in my life. And that was a very important point for me. From 16 to 22 though I realized how I struggled with whether or not God really loved me and really was going to glorify me throughout eternity the Bible talks about, whether this is really true truth.

Because inwardly there were things about me I didn’t like. I didn’t like who I was. There were things that were going on that disappointed me about me. I felt ashamed about things. And that inward struggle, so I had to really think through. It was about a six-year period there, “What does it really mean to have a healthy self-regard? What happens when other people are honored more than me? When accolades come to other people, how am I going to process that?”

I remember when I first went to Wheaton, the first three people I met. One guy had his own radio program “Nationally Syndicated”. He was coming to Wheaton, he was going to continue, had a deep voice. Another guy was an all-American football player that looked like a Greek god. And then I met this woman who, a girl, a freshman, who was a concert pianist and already played in some of the great halls. And I’m thinking, “What have I walked into?” I felt completely insignificant. And I began to try to process, “How can I develop an inner contentment if outwardly I can’t achieve at the level of other people’s achievements?”

Jonathan: Sure. And so at age 16 or at age 48, right, there can be this outward accolades in terms of appearance or outwardly success, but there can be this personal unhappiness that in this instance drives us to reflect, to ruminate, to begin to think deeply about who am I as a person. “Am I happy with myself?” and in your instance it drove you towards God at age 16, towards being open to that moment when you saw the movie and accepted Christ in your life, right?

And so this is, again, the good side of experiencing this crisis or this personal dissatisfaction around happiness and then moving towards something positive.

Emerson: That’s right. Well, recently Michael Jordan was interviewed. I think he turned 50, if I remember correctly, and he is struggling with depression. And they make the point that he’s just not happy. And one of the reasons he’s not happy is because the
adrenaline that he experienced all those years on the basketball court is probably the greatest basketball player that ever lived. That’s why he’s into gambling, they say, and he acknowledges there’s no adrenaline, there’s no…

[16:12] If you build your life, Jesus said, on the sand, if everything you are as a person is based on your external performance or the way you appear… My heart goes out to so many in the acting industry. They are not even being themselves! They are acting, they got good recall and they’re attractive as people.

[16:29] But what happens when they lose their mind or they get old and they’re not being sought anymore, somebody replaces them? The despair and the depression is immeasurable. That’s why some people kill themselves in that whole industry. They just give it up. They don’t want to continue to live.

[16:44] And so, as a younger man I began to try to think through, “Where is this headed?” If I put all my bang for the buck in these external things of fame, of fortune, of good looks—that wasn’t going to be a problem with me—physically fit and so on and so forth, then there would be a real wall that I was going to hit given that I’ve built my life on all those things and then I lost them.

[17:11] And at the point I lost them, now who am I and will I be able to sit by myself and be content? You know, a great exercise is to envision yourself in a retirement center in a wheelchair at 89 when all your friends have died. Many aging people have said, “The sad thing about getting old is you outlive all your family and friends.” And this aloneness can turn into loneliness and melancholy. And if we haven’t built into our life, those things Paul said, “The inner man is being renewed day after day, even though the outer man is decaying.”

[17:40] And if I’m building into my life all the wrong things, then I’m going to end up really having a midlife crisis, and I’m going to have a third quarter crisis, and I’m going to have an end of the life crisis. And so, as a young man a began thinking, “I want to get this right.” Does that make sense?

[17:55] Jonathan: It does. And I think, as you mentioned, what Paul says I know that you’ve got a number of other Biblical and Scriptural references here. And I think you ask these questions as I’m looking at what you wrote. You said, “Did I or do I want to be the one who determines my own worth, or do I want God to determine my worth?” And I think that that’s what you were kind of getting at, that question, right? Is I’m the one who determines my self-worth or others determine my self-worth? I mean, that is a façade.

[18:25] Emerson: Well, it’s a performance baby or appearance baby. I mean, it’s all based on what you think of me, rather than me being able to sit by myself and have a sense of peace and restfulness. And I thought, “Wait a minute, I can’t let you decide how I feel
about myself.” I mean, that doesn’t mean that affirmation is unimportant. We all need encourageness.

[18:45] So let me just insert here: we need encouragement. That’s the body of Christ: encourage one another, stimulate one another. We need each other. There is no downplaying of the importance of being inspired and guided by the people. We need other people.

[19:00] But if at the end of the day it’s all of that, and that I am only going to feel good about myself based on people’s positive opinion on me, then I’m going to be in trouble. It doesn’t mean that you become the arrogant person. There’s the narcissistic person of, “I don’t care what other people think,” and they think they can walk on water.

[19:17] So, again, I put the caveat and we’re not talking to that person because that person isn’t listening to us right now. You are. And you’re in this category of the normal individual who is hearing us loud and clear and probably identifying with everything we said.

[19:32] So, for my case I needed to come to this point of saying as a Christian, you know, what I saw things in the Scripture that really touched my heart. And I thought, “Is this really true?” And there were two points. I saw the love of Christ, that God loved me, that Christ loved me. And not only that, that throughout eternity I was going to receive the very glory that Jesus Christ received.

[19:52] That I was co-heir with Christ. Everything Christ inherits, we inherit. The glory that’s placed upon Jesus Christ, God Almighty is going to share that same glory and place it on you and me. And Jonathan, I want you to read these verses, because there’s this new believer from that age 16 to 22 I had to really kind of, “Do I really believe this? And if I really believe this, what’s the logic of this? What’s the implication of this? What must I infer from this?”

[20:17] I mean, here’s the bottom line. If God loves me, how could I come to a point where I don’t have some degree of healthy self-love. If God is going to glorify me, why would I think that He wants me to live in shame and why would I think He intends to dishonor me by not responding to me? It wasn’t logical. So let’s have you read those Scriptures.

[20:37] Jonathan: Sure. This is the first set of Scriptures. It would be Romans 8:35 and then 37 through 39. It says, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? But in all these things we’ll overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us for I’m convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
Emerson: Well, on that you see the repetition: the love of Christ who loved us. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God. And as I looked at those things, I realized first of all, he’s not saying that bad things don’t happen to good people. The Romans were thinking they were condemned, that they were separated from God because there was persecution. They were being led to this slaughter like lambs. The loved ones were dying.

So let’s not pretend that the love of Christ means that there’s going to be health and wealth and prosperity and peace. Paul is saying, “Hey, there can be famine, there can be nakedness, there can be distress,” but he is saying, “In the midst of that we’ll come to a point where we believe that Christ loves us in spite of what’s going on circumstantially.” And we’ll let that create a sense of joy, a sense of peace, a sense of, “You know what? God is for me, He’s not against me.” He says that in the Romans passage.

And I had to really come to grips because I often wondered, “Does He really love me? And maybe He doesn’t because I’m not lovable.” And I can see the things about me that are not lovable. Surely God doesn’t love me in light of who I am, and I certainly don’t like who I am. So those were some of the inner struggles that I have. But then I came across this prayer to the Ephesians.

Jonathan: Yeah. I have Ephesians 3:17 through 19. “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and how to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

Emerson: There it is again. Paul was praying for the Ephesians, that they would know the love of Christ. And then he says, “Which surpasses knowledge.” And it really is true. I love it. We also have a peace that surpasses understanding.

That Paul is saying this peace that we have, the love that we can experience, you can’t put it in words. It can’t be defined, it can’t be stated, it can’t be comprehended. But we have to come to a point as believers where there is this subjective element that we know, that we know, that we know and that He really does love us.

Jonathan: I like that phrase here in this translation that “you may be filled up to all the fullness.” This would be who you are, right?

Emerson: Yes, yes.

Jonathan: That this would kind of complete you in a sense, that there would be a fullness, that you’d be filled up with this love of Christ.
Emerson: Well, biblically this a priority, that the love of God, the glory of God it doesn’t get much greater than that. Throughout eternity He’s going to love us and throughout eternity he’s going to glorify us. And those are eternal virtues. It isn’t going to cease. These bodies will die, but not the love of Christ, not the glory of Christ.

And so I realized, “You know what? I want to kind of focus on those two concepts. And I want to come to grips with that they mean.” But read these about the glory. There are several verses here, not only the love of Christ but the glory.

Jonathan: Romans 8:17, “And if children, heirs also—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, have indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” John 17:22, “The glory which you have given me, I have given to them. That they may be one just as we are one.” And 2 Thessalonians 2:14, “It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Emerson: When I used to meditate on those, Jonathan, I’m thinking, “Something’s coming.” Something is coming, and it’s beyond our best comprehension. But here’s the deal: I began to recognize a logic that was inescapable. How could I hate myself—and to some of you listening, you hate yourselves. You’ve just have been [in the deepest recess], you don’t like yourself, that’s why you busy yourself, that’s why you don’t spend time alone, you got to have the music on, you got to have the TV on, you got to be with people. You cannot—I shouldn’t say “cannot”—you will not go off by yourself because you don’t like the inner self.

And I can identify with that. “How could I hate myself, though,” I said, “When Christ loved me so much? And how could I have disdain for myself given that Christ intended to glorify me throughout eternity with the glory that He received? And how could I be unhappy with my life when He cared so much for me?”

So that’s where I began to realize, “I need to align my thinking with God’s thinking.” And in that proverbial way I need to take a leap of faith. And so I said, “What I believe that God loved me, even though I did not feel His love,” very important question, “would I believe that God love me even though I did not feel His love?”

See, I was going on my feelings and I had to shift the faith. Believing what the Scripture said apart from how I felt, and what I believed God loved me even though I did not feel love for myself.

So I knew I had to come to a point where I made a decision to believe that God was for me, even when circumstances made me feel bad about myself, when others were better than me and received more honor and I felt sorry for myself. I knew I needed to recognize my unique worth to God, that I mattered to him no matter what. I had worth
to God, even though others received the adoration of the world while I sat in the shadows.

[26:10] I worked on believing that Abba Father loved me and intended to honor me in the way of his choosing. And I began to realize that even God is disciplining me for my sin was based on his love—Hebrews 12 and so many other passages. It was not His desire to shame me, it was not His desire to punish me, that fell on Christ. And over time, this kind of realization began to impact my self image. Does that make sense?


Emerson: And one of the results of this kind of mindset is that it gives one an incentive—and here it is—to begin again on the heels of failure. Though one fails, one is not a failure in the eyes of God, even though one does not like himself on any given day, he falls back on the fact that God loves him and intends to glorify and honor him throughout eternity. That’s when one stands up again, when lifts up his head again.

[26:59] So can I you, who are listening, have you faced-off with God’s love for you and His future glory? I want you to meditate, as I did, on those Scriptures about what God says is His love for you and His intent for glorify you. Really give yourself some time and think about that and ask yourself, “Is this too good to be true? Is it too good to be true?”

[27:21] You see, I really think in some ways this is less about your midlife crisis and this is more about our crisis of faith. Will you believe what God says? So if you’re going through that, this is the good side of that, Jonathan. It is a healthy thing to go through those moments of despair and crisis, because you can come out on the other side with the richness of these truths.

[27:42] Jonathan: So, again, somebody could still make an occupational change, a life change, but if they’re doing that alongside this “crisis of faith” and really reflecting on who they are in relationship to God, it certainly has a different outcome than, “I’m doing this based on…” you know, trying to create a sense of self worth, a new identity, occupation or whatever it is, and there’s kind of an absence of God in the equation.

[28:12] Emerson: Well, that’s where Tevye would say, “On the other hand…” Now let’s look at the other side of it, which you’re proposing that it can be a bad solution. Making a statement, “I need to love and respect myself,” can be a bad thing. There can be a wrong self-regard.

[28:28] I mean, we hear men and women exclaim, “I need to focus on me. I’m going to be happy. I’ve not been happy. It’s time I look out for number one. I don’t care what others think. I’m done with the same old, same old. From now on it is me first.”
And, of course, long term such a self-serving mindset really doesn't serve the person very well. And you deal with people, I’m sure Jonathan, right, who have made the decision, “I’m going to put myself first.” Do you have any comments about that as we begin? What questions arise about the wrong choices people make on this?

Jonathan: Sure, I mean, I don’t think it would be uncommon in my field for people to arrive on a counselor’s or psychologist’s doorstep with this very thing. “My friends, etc., are telling me it’s finally time for me to focus on me.” I certainly experience both flavors of that. Those that I sense are saying that with some caution and reservation, and want to know what that looks like, and those on the other side who clearly there’s a selfish component to it.

And I even get people that arrive at my office who’ve gone from one counselor to the next, and frankly, they’re tired of the message to focus on themselves because they believe that there is a selfishness to it that eliminates those around them.

“If you want to be happy, you need to leave this person. If you want to be happy, you need to leave this job. If you want to be happy, you need…” I mean, there’s always a removal of something, a change in a certain sense, and yet they don’t feel like it’s the complete picture, and I think that that’s what you’re trying to provide here today, this complete picture, this good and this bad.

So certainly the answer to that question is whether it’s called the midlife crisis or somebody coming to the point where they’re just trying to figure out what to do at this stage in their lives.

Emerson: But let’s look at the downside, the dark side of this. And there are some Scriptures that warn us about becoming too self-focused. Do you want to read those?

Jonathan: Sure. So first would be John 5:44, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”

Emerson: That’s Jesus speaking. So, you do not seek the glory that is from God, but you seek glory from one another?” Not a good thing.

Jonathan: 2 Timothy 3:2, “For men will be lovers of self.”

Emerson: Yeah, and that’s that verse that many people quote who are aware of the self-esteem teachings. “Wait a minute, this whole self-love that you were just talking about, Emerson, is wrong and along with the fact that Paul says here, ‘You must not be lovers of self.’” Well, that’s to be understood. You need to love your neighbor as yourself. You can’t love your neighbor if you’re not loving yourselves. So there’s a
healthy side of self-love that we already looked at, but here is the unhealthy side. This is this narcissistic tendency.

[31:08] Jonathan: And then 2 Corinthians 5:15, “And he died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again on their behalf.” Romans 12:3, “For through the grace given to me I say to every one among you: Not to think more highly of himself than you ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment has God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

[31:33] And finally Galatians 6:3, “For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

[31:40] Emerson: Yeah, these Scriptures are painting an unpleasant picture of what God reveals as an unhealthy self-regard. So I ask the question—we’ve seen this: What about the wife and mother experiencing the midlife crisis and is now trying to find herself, “I’m trying to find myself,” as though she lost herself somewhere along the line. And like she may be sitting in the back room somewhere and she’s got to go find herself.

[32:05] But, so in a sense let’s say she goes back to school. Now, I’m not saying that a 45-year old woman should not go back to college or graduate school. On the one hand that could be the best thing she ever does for herself, and it really encourages her growth in Christ and it just opens up wonderful doors. So let me put that upfront. This can be an extremely good thing to do.

[32:25] On the other hand, and I’ve seen it become around doing, and many of you perhaps know the same situation, especially if she goes back to a secular college campus, huge thing, whatever, and thinking this is the best way to love herself and respect herself. She begins to pursue a new identity for who she is.

[32:43] But, you know, the truth is, if you unpack this, it really doesn’t reflect who God made her to be. Instead she chases after a carnal goal based on who she thinks she ought to be or who others think she ought to be. And partly what prompted this series, Jonathan, is I was just with a woman who is talking to me about another woman who basically was saying, “I’m done with giving. I’m going to start giving to myself.”

[33:08] And the point that she made about—many women come to this point, particularly if they don’t have a lot of children now—they refocus their area, “I’m not happy,” and they either say their husband is causing it or they need to find themselves.

[33:20] But one of the things that was so beautiful that they didn’t pay attention is that they were giving, giving, giving because there was joy in giving. Yeah, there’s fatigue. Yeah, there’s exhaustion. Yeah, there’s lack of appreciation. But the truth is many of these
women are nurturing, caring people who are just exhausted, not unlike some of the Old Testament prophets.

[33:37] You don’t stop giving simply because you grow weary in doing good. That’s the warn in the Scripture. So instead these people say, “You know what? I’m going to stop giving.” That’s the solution here. “And I’m going to start giving to myself.” And that can be a serious mistake.

[33:51] And you probably have seen that, and she develops this mental committee and she is now serving these people in her brain. And I’ve seen this and I feel badly. She ends up having an affair, and she goes on for several years. Her road walk with Christ completely ends. She is in this hollow stage, she may divorce, she leaves the kids… I mean, and then she comes back in five years and realizes, “I’ve made myself a complete fool. I did all the wrong things because I didn’t answer the question and find the right solution to the question that I was asking.” Do you have any comments on that scenario?

[34:27] Jonathan: No, I think I would just align with, yeah, I would… I’ve seen it and I counsel people like that, and they are—for a lack of a better term, whether man or woman, they’re lost. Hopefully, although sadly, the hard lesson to learn they come back and realize what’s going on. But what we’re trying to do is for people that are, you’re kind of in this phase, how can we encourage them to think differently about this.

[35:01] Emerson: And I say this very lovingly as your older brother, Phil, listen to me, you’re not an exception. Because I’ve often said, “Why do people keep doing the same thing over and over again when everybody knows the scene that I’ve just described happen?” Because they come to a point where I’m unique. I’m an exception. It’s different with me.

[35:16] And I’m going to just say candidly, “No, you’re not.” And if you really love yourself you wouldn’t do this. If you really respected yourself you wouldn’t do this. You would step back and say, “You know what? If I keep going in the direction I’m headed, I’m going to get there.” And I just appeal to you as your older brother, trust us here. Even though you feel empty in the way the family is, the marriage is, your own self, go in the course that you go.

[35:43] If you know in your heart of hearts that’s not God’s will for you, then just stay in the shadows, it’s okay. He loves you, as I pointed out this for you. Because I want to illustrate this with a pastor that had some of the same struggles, but he went the correct direction. And I want you to learn a principle, what he encountered. Jonathan, why don’t you read about this pastor.
Episode 055 - The Midlife Crisis of the Christian- Am I Really Happy With Who I Am As a Person?.mp3
File length 00:45:13

[36:06] Jonathan: I know of a pastor who did not travel to speak in the early years of his ministry because he recognized it only took him one evening in a hotel room to have an affair to ruin his whole life.

[36:16] He observed many pastors falling right and left, so why risk it, even though the invitation to come speak was significant. Why risk it, even though he could really feel good about himself on the heels of the accolades, feeling a deeper love and respect for himself.

[36:29] Emerson: And a thinking person realizes that self-love and self-respect must not be derived from the praises of other people, as we have pointed out. How will I feel about myself when the palm waving ceases? Yes, as we pointed out, affirmation quite often confirms to us that what we’re doing is beneficial—hear me loud and clear in that point—but when we come addicted to the affirmation, then we’re not content within ourselves apart from these people.

[36:57] And I dare say, we do not love and respect ourselves as God intended. It is a superficial self-love, it is a superficial self-respect, and that’s why I say, “Talk to me when you’re on a wheelchair in a retirement center.”

[37:10] So, Jonathan, you can, I think, hit this point again about self-love and self-respect being built on all the wrong things. I mean, even in your athletic prowess, you played two college sports, what’s your observation of individuals who built their whole life—and I remember B. J. Weber, who is our good buddy and my good friend, who is the chaplain of the Yankees always saying to the players, “You’re one injury away from an ended career.”

[37:35] And when you heard him say that, how did that strike you and why is it important to us to hear the wisdom of that?

[37:42] Jonathan: Well, yeah, I mean, I’ve experienced some of this myself. And I think in many of these instances we’re not necessarily intentionally building our whole life on these things, whether it’s an athletic endeavor, whether it’s an occupational achievement, but when it ends—it will end, right?—it can become very clear to some people that there was not the foundation that was needed there.

[38:09] This healthy self life, love, built on a relationship with Christ was not there. There was a performance based, an occupational or athletic kind of thing, or whatever the case may be. It all comes crashing down and your world is shaken to its core.

[38:29] And I’ve experienced that firsthand and I’ve dealt with a lot of people who experience that. It’s, “What do I do now?” And that’s an important question to ask because if something ends in your life, I mean, certainly you’ve got to move on, but I think at this
moment, or at this midlife crisis or something is happening to you, “Where do I maybe kind of redefine who I am in a relationship to Christ and build my life on a different foundation not taking away from the fact that I still need to have pursuits, I still need to have goals, I still need to do things or kind of figure out what I’m supposed to do with the rest of my life.”

[39:10] But that certainly looks different when one has said, “Look, who I am in relationship to those around me, who I am in relationship to my occupation, who I am in relationship…” fill in the blank. It doesn’t ultimately matter because I know who I am in Christ as you stated.

[39:27] Emerson: Right. Well, and you were too college athlete, to make two teams of basketball and soccer and then came the injuries. And so you know firsthand. And I think an excellent observation there, we’re not talking about the fact that we shouldn’t perform. I mean, you and I are very intense, very aggressive at what we’re doing even on this, excited about what we’re doing, very diligent, very disciplined, long hours. We love it. But we both recognize, “Hey, I could have a stroke, there could be Alzheimer’s,” any number of things.

[39:57] We have to live with attentiveness to this, that there’s nothing permanent here. I can’t put all my eggs in one basket. So we’re not suggesting, “Stop performing,” unless you become egotistical. That’s not the solution here. The issue is, “Why am I doing what I’m doing and what’s the basis of my inner happiness, my inner contentment, my inner restfulness, my inner peace.”

[40:16] If I’m at a point of crisis, “What’s going on and what’s the solution here and how should I proceed?” And I think the person who is listening this we bring this to a close. I want to pray for them in a moment, but I want you to add any additional appoints as we transition to the end here. But, you who are listening, are you at this point of crisis about who you are, or do you know someone who is and are they willing to listen to this?

[40:41] Maybe you’ve been handed this by a person, “Hey, you’ve just given voice to me about this and I want you to listen what Emerson and Jonathan were saying.” See it as a healthy moment. Don’t despair because you’re going through this.

[40:52] I mean, actually it’s a very good thing to go through. I think there are many people who are around thinking, and I’ve often said people who kill themselves quite often have become to the realization, the implication of what they’ve done. They have themselves for what they’ve done. The solution isn’t suicide, but they’ve taken it seriously.

[41:07] Other people perhaps ought want to kill themselves but don’t, they just keep going alive and keep doing wrong doing. They’ve just hardened themselves. So this moment of
reflection where you really turn in or where you don’t like what you see, is not necessarily bad. It can be that your conscience and your convictions are being violated, you don’t like who you’ve become and you’re despairing and depressed over that. That’s not a bad thing.

[41:28] That can be a very good thing. Jonathan is a clinical psychologist. When people are humble in the face of these things, it really can be a major breakthrough and wonderful things are in store.

[41:38] But if you have built your life on the wrong things and you’re still playing with, “Maybe I need to do more of what I’ve been doing, maybe I need to have another relationship, I need to have another affair, I need to get another degree.” I mean, you just continue to go down that route thinking at some moment it’s going to bring happiness.

[41:57] And we’re just saying, if you don’t have it within you, you’re probably not going to discover it if you keep doing what you’ve been doing. So it’s a beautiful moment to sit back, spend some time alone and think about what we’ve been sharing. Jonathan, what are your last thoughts?

[42:13] Jonathan: I would just concur with everything that you said. You said it well and I don’t want to add or subtract anything that you said. It was an encouragement to me. I hope it’s an encouragement to others. As I indicated in the beginning, I think for some people this is a moment in time, for others this is a perpetual kind of just reexamination. We just need to keep coming back to it and keep hearing it. And so I hope it speaks to people in that way as well.

[42:38] Emerson: Well, why don’t you read these last two paragraphs and then I’ll close in prayer.

[42:42] Jonathan: Are you in an inward crisis point? Are you declaring, “I am not happy, therefore I need to start loving and respecting myself, I need to focus on me”? Which way would you go with this? Will you decide based on the good solution offered by Abba Father who loves us and will glorify us forever, and therefore we need to deep in our faith in this message and act on this? Or would we decide to make ourselves our own lord and god and make ourselves happy our own way whatever it takes?

[43:07] Emerson: Well, I hope the answer is in the first question. But let’s just pray for you. This is a serious time for some of you who really are not happy and your heart’s broken about any number of things and we just want to pray for your father.

[43:21] I do believe that something very good can come from this, that this individual is going through. I don’t know all the circumstances, I don’t know all the factors, but I do know
that suffering, difficulties, trials, Your word says happens. Jesus went to the cross, so we don’t minimize the seriousness of what’s happened to this person.

[43:46] But your word is very clear. There’s no incongruity between the suffering of Christ and the fact that you loved your Son, and there’s no incongruity, Paul said, between famine and sword and peril and the love of Christ. There’s no incongruity there.

[44:02] And because these bad things happen, does not mean that Your love is not real and cannot be experienced in spite of the circumstances. And Your love is not proven by the circumstances, it happens apart from them. And so I pray that this person right now will reopen their heart to You and your love and to envision the glory to come and that they are worth Jesus to you.

[44:27] You died in the cross for them. You love them. You care for them. Lord, may they take this by faith, may they not let their feelings dictate this. May they not let the opinions of others dictate this. May they develop a self-image based on your image on them. Through Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

[44:45] Jonathan: Take care. We’ll see you next week.

[44:49] You’ve been listening to the Love and Respect Podcast. For more information and additional products, go to LoveAndRespect.com and follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Join Emerson and Jonathan next week for another episode.