

on each child of His. This is His creative love for each one. God doesn't minister according to set patterns but according to individual needs and His own divine creativity.

A Time to Let Go

As severe as grieving invariably proves to be, we can be assured of this: normally there is an end. Viorst observes:

"A time will have to come when we become willing to let go of the lost relationship be it our career position in the world, a cherished person through death or divorce, a circle of close friends, or whatever. Our mourning is pathological when we cannot, or we will not, let it go."⁶

The pain of loss generally extends throughout a broad range of experiences, including retirement. Abstractly, this has to do with loss of self-definition, including images we've held of ourselves—physical appearance, attractiveness to others, statuses we've assigned ourselves, and statuses assigned us by others. Quite subconsciously, what was always important to us is how, where, and with whom we projected our best self-image. The "presentation of self," to use sociologist Irving Goffman's term, is everything—it was in times past and is now.

It is not inconsequential that we speak of "midlife crisis." Here as never before we're conscious of great transitional changes. Essentially, this is loss of "our younger self"—the only self we counted on not to change! So midlife changes sound a warning in terms of the future. For one thing, physical changes in the 40s are unmistakable and irreversible. As a pastor friend in his late 30s said to me: "I recognize that I'm no longer able to play a game of softball one day and walk the next!" Another observes, "I've exchanged weight *lifting* for weight *watching*!" How many of us—with a nervous smile—ruefully acknowledge this!

Not Any Easier

All too plainly, the image in the mirror tells the story: “I’m no longer the same person as before.” Or “I don’t have what I once had.” Try as we may, whatever clever end-runs seem promising, each coming year brings added physical and emotional costs. In disbelief we ask, “Why is it so much harder to come up with the physical and emotional payment? Why the decreasing attractiveness of the social amenities of my position?” Simply put, despite fitness programs—or whatever else—we are *tired of it all!* There is a wistfulness over life losing its zest.

Midlife sounded the message strong and clear: with passing time, life doesn’t get easier. *But, wait, were we listening then? Did we take it seriously then? How does this process affect us in the retirement transition?*

For a moment, trace the course from a different angle. In our 40s and 50s, relationships with our children underwent critical changes as did relationships with our parents. The children were moving off into a separate universe while we become parents to our parents. Some families are faced with devoting more time caring for aging parents than the time devoted to raising their own children. In contrast, many single mothers today are leaning on their retired parents to raise their children while they themselves are working to support the family.

Inevitably as a retiree your relationship with your spouse undergoes changes in anticipation of newly emerging roles. The empty nest—most destabilizing to a wife and her mothering role—is something a husband cannot avoid sharing. As a retired husband and wife, you are not just retirees, but a couple again, your life focused on the primary relationship you share and on your social needs as a couple. It may have been a long time since this type of close-