Generally speaking the church in Britain has been good at discipling believers in the first half of life, but less good from midlife onwards. Many committed believers reach a plateau where they feel stagnated, exhausted or confused. Some drop out, others take a back seat, and a few struggle on asking, ‘Is this as good as it gets?’

I reached this point around my fiftieth birthday, brought up as a solid evangelical who became a lively charismatic. I saw some of my friends in ministry experience burnout, and lived myself with tiredness as a constant companion. Something within me cried out, ‘There must be a better way to live than this.’ At the same time a hunger to know God more intimately surfaced within me. I was a missionary, church pastor, and trainer of others, and yet something was lacking.

In several different ways God led me into an awareness of contemplative spirituality and my relationship with him was revolutionised. Since that time I have devoted myself to introducing others into this same dimension of intimacy with God, to which there seems to be three main aspects.

1. **Realising the primacy of being over doing**. In the first half of life youthful enthusiasm and optimistic zeal carry us along in a whirl of activity, but this means we often live on the surface of life and seldom experience its depths. As we grow older we intuitively search for a more inward way, and the spiritual disciplines of stillness, silence and solitude, become significant for us. Scripture says, ‘Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10),’ yet how difficult it can be to slow down and simply be. Adopting a slower pace and incorporating Sabbath rest into our lifestyles enable our souls to breathe, bring us to a deeper place in God, and help prevent burnout.
2. **Discovering our identity as God’s beloved children**. Most of us know in our heads that we are loved unconditionally, but few of us experience it deeply in our hearts. Our identity is more likely to be shaped by achievement, productivity and reputation than it is by what God says of us. As a consequence our woundedness and hurt make us insecure and competitive, and leave us always trying to find love rather than to give it. Only a deep experience of grace can change this, and only the discovery that we are known and loved by God as we are can liberate us from the performance trap and transform us into those who can minister life to others.
3. **Learning what it means to work from a place of rest**. As we set out on the journey of discipleship it is easy to think that service is what we do for God. We try our best and work our hardest, and may be surprised when we fail or are not as effective as we expected. Somewhere along the line we reach the point where we say ‘I can’t do this God’ – to which he replies, ‘Good! Now let’s see what I can do through you.’ This is when the divine exchange takes place that Paul talks about in Galatians 2:20: ‘I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.’ We begin to realise that Christian life and ministry is about co-operation with God and collaboration with his Spirit. Gradually we accept that it is his work and he is the senior partner. We learn to listen to his voice, follow his promptings and allow him to express himself through us. Striving and straining is replaced by a restful confidence that he will use as in the way he chooses – we must simply be ready and responsive when the time comes.

Once we have made these discoveries the second-half of life opens up for us in a new way, with a greater possibility of fruitfulness, both of character and influence. The transition may not be easy, and may take time, and it is often helpful to have a guide – a mentor or spiritual director to accompany us as we journey through strange spiritual terrain.

This has been my own experience, and I can honestly say that I am enjoying my Christian life now more than ever before. Everyone’s journey is unique, of course, and there is no formula or pattern that fits everyone rigidly; but there are some well-worn paths and some helpful signposts, so we need not be left alone and disorientated as we find our way through mid-life.