

Aging's Invitations

Which Ones Are for You?

Here are a bunch of quotes, essays and videos that give voice to a variety of invitations that people have received from their middle and later years. Identify the two or three pieces that resonate with you the most.

Overheard Invitations from Midlife

Quote - [James Hollis](#)

In the secret club of the Middle Passage, there is an invitation for greater consciousness and an enlarged capacity for choice. With greater consciousness comes a greater opportunity for forgiveness of others and of ourselves, and, with forgiveness, release from the past. We must address the making of our myths more consciously or we shall never be more than the sum of what has happened to us.

Quote - [James Hollis](#)

The second adulthood... is only attainable when the provisional identities have been discarded and the false self has died. The pain of such loss may be compensated by the rewards of the new life which follows, but the person in the midst of the Middle Passage may only feel the dying... The good news which follows the death of the first adulthood is that one may reclaim one's life. There is a second shot at what was left behind.

Quote - [Brené Brown](#)

Midlife is not about the fear of death. Midlife is death... It's a painful irony that the very things that may have kept us safe growing up ultimately get in the way of our becoming the parents, partners, and/or people we want to be. Maybe, like me, you are the perfect pleaser and performer, and now all of that perfection and rule-following is suffocating. Or maybe you work hard to keep people at a safe distance and now the distance has turned into intolerable loneliness. There are also the folks who grew up taking care of everyone else because they had no choice. Their death is having to let go of the caretaking, and their rebirth is learning how to take care of themselves (and work through the pushback that always comes with setting new boundaries). Whatever the issue, it seems as if we spend the first half of our lives shutting down feelings to stop the hurt and the second half trying to open everything back up to heal the hurt.

Quote - [James Hollis](#)

Our task at midlife is to be strong enough to relinquish the ego-urgencies of the first half and open ourselves to a greater wonder.

Quote - [Charles M. Blow](#)

I realize that, according to the odds, my life is nearly two-thirds over, that I have more summers behind me than in front of me... [And so] I have started to manage my regrets and to reduce them, to forgive myself for foolish mistakes and reckless choices...

Quote - [David Whyte](#)

The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance, our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, or conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.

Poem - Failing and Flying, Jack Gilbert

Full poem at <https://poets.org/poem/failing-and-flying>

Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew.
It's the same when love comes to an end,
or the marriage fails and people say
they knew it was a mistake...
I believe Icarus was not failing as he fell,
but just coming to the end of his triumph.

Quote - Elizabeth Gilbert on being 54

I love that I get to call people "honey" and "sweetheart." I love that I have gathered so much expertise about how to do my job (writing books) that nothing about it really scares me anymore... I love that I have friends who are twenty years younger than me, and friends who are twenty years older than me, and I feel like we are all the same age... I love that I have learned how to say no to people, and to understand that they will survive their disappointment, just as I can survive my disappointment when people say no to me...
Aging has taken away most of my terror that I will die if you don't like me. You don't have to like me — that's cool. I get it. I don't like everyone, either. A friend and I who are the same age always say, whenever someone decides to dislike us or disapprove of us: "That's alright. They just don't want our magic." And then we move on. I could not have done this twenty years ago.

Quote - Neko Case

Being 52 has really shone a spotlight on how much of my life was wasted in the tractor beam of the male gaze... I care less about my appearance, which is something I pretended to do for so long! And I find my physicality much funnier. Human bodies have always been funny to me in an affectionate way. The things we expect of our bodies is ridiculous. Now that the curtain is kind of falling away it gets funnier and... I treat my body with much more affection.

Essay - How to Lengthen Your Life: An excerpt of Alain de Botton's *A Therapeutic Journey*

<https://oldster.substack.com/p/how-to-lengthen-your-life>

"We don't need to add years; we need to densify the time we have left by ensuring that every day is lived consciously—and we can do this via a maneuver as simple as it is momentous: by starting to notice all that we have as yet only seen..."

Poem - What's Left, Kerry Hardie

Full poem at <https://www.ayearofbeinghere.com/2013/04/kerry-hardie-whats-left.html>

Poem read by author: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lheNAIGAiFk>

The washing moves on the line, the sparrows pull
at the heaps of drying weeds that I've left around.
Perhaps this is middle age. Untidy, unfinished,
knowing there'll never be time now to finish,
liking the plants — their strong lives —
not caring about flowers, sitting in weeds
to write things down, look at things,
watching the sway of shirts on the line...
I want to know how to live what's left
With my eyes open and my hands open;
I want to stand at the door in the rain
Listening, sniffing, gaping.
Fearful and joyous,
like an idiot before God.

Overheard Invitations from Later Years

Quote - [Dr. Sharon Blackie](#)

In the last part of our life, focus is everything. The years when we imagined we needed to be all things to all people are long gone, along with our dilettante days: the days of experimenting with this and that, of adopting and discarding different personas, of reinventing ourselves for every season of the year. Now, it's time to get serious. To let the inessential fall away and focus on the essence of who we are... Who is it that we are; what is it that we feel we are here to do? What do we imagine these final years of our lives are really for?

Quote - [Jane Fonda](#)

Perhaps the central purpose of the third act is to go back and to try, if appropriate, to change our relationship to the past... If we can go back and alter our relationship, re-vision our relationship to past people and events, neural pathways can change. And if we can maintain the more positive feelings about the past, that becomes the new norm. It's like resetting a thermostat. It's not having experiences that makes us wise. It's reflecting on the experiences that we've had that makes us wise... It helps us become what we might have been.

Video - Be Free in Aging

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Np-uU-tH6oU&t=465s>

(From minute 6:17) - "Actually I've been taken by surprise at how full of purpose my life has become. It's the word 'retire' which is the deadly word I think. Anybody who is looking forward to their retirement has got the wrong end of the stick in my opinion. In point of fact, it should be the beginning of life. It should be the start, not the end. This is the moment to move forward and be even more proactive in whatever area you want to be. Now you are free! Did you ever want to write a book? Did you ever want to paint what you see out there? Did you ever want to make something beautiful that isn't beautiful at the moment? Do it! Now you do it! So you may not become famous. So you may not be much good at it. But then it allows you to move onto something else which maybe you will be really good at. But until you open that part of you that has been shut down for so long because of the necessities of life, it's not going to happen. And it will become a self enlarging process. You will grow with it.

Quote - [Paula Bramante](#)

As people move into their 60s and beyond, things change. Many of life's challenges have been met and played... With a little imagination, we begin to see the value of turning what has been decades of outward gaze to a more inward direction. We step back from constantly doing and slip into life as being. We see our life as an evolving work of art, a kind of living poem that revises itself daily.

Poem - Becoming an Elder, Cathy Carmody

Full poem found [HERE](#)

Leaving behind my journey of struggling and racing through
the white water of many rivers, I become the river,
creating my own unique way.

Leaving behind my self-imposed role as a tree upon
which others have leaned, I now become the wind...

Leaving behind the boxes I've created in my life, crammed with
roles, responsibilities, rules and fears,
I become the wild and unpredictable space
within which flowers sprout and grow...

Quote - Case Kenny

Your time on Earth is limited. Don't try to "age with grace" - age with [mischief, audacity](#), and a good story to tell.

Video Clip - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on aging for women and “the bag”

https://www.instagram.com/reel/C9R5NSHCWtx/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D

Poem - For Retirement, John O'Donohue

Full poem at <https://lindagraham-mft.net/john-odonohue-on-retirement/>

This is where your life has arrived,
After all the years of effort and toil...
You stand on the shore of a new invitation...
Have the courage for a new approach to time;
Allow it to slow until you find freedom...
befriend your own beauty of soul...

Poem - For Old Age, John O'Donohue

Full poem at <https://mollystrongheart.blogspot.com/2021/03/john-odonohue-for-old-age.html>

May you have the passion to heal what has hurt you,
and allow it to come closer and become one with you.
May you have great dignity,
And a sense of how free you are...

Poem - Warning, Jenny Joseph (read by Helena Bonham Carter) *On wearing that purple hat!*

<https://www.instagram.com/p/C6lZVIPiKnt/>

Videos - On the invitations of love after journeying together for many years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td2O06HfhDY> ; A follow-up video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbyQhbZJhwl>

Quote - [Zalman Schachter-Shalomi](#)

Elders serve as conduits between the divine realm and the mundane world, making the abstract truths of spirituality accessible to the community by embodying them in their everyday behavior.

Quote - [Parker J. Palmer](#)

Age brings diminishment, but more than a few come with benefits. I've lost the capacity for multitasking, but I've rediscovered the joy of doing one thing at a time. My thinking has slowed a bit, but experience has made it deeper and richer. I'm done with big and complex projects, but more aware of the loveliness of simple things: a talk with a friend, a walk in the woods, sunsets and sunrises, a night of good sleep.

Quote - [Parker J. Palmer](#)

Coming to terms with the soul-truth of who I am—with my complex and confusing mix of darkness and light—has required my ego to shrivel up. Nothing shrivels a person better than age. That's what all those wrinkles are about.

Quote - [Parker J. Palmer](#)

Let's stop talking about “passing the baton” to the young as we elders finish running our laps. Since most of us are more skilled at sitting than at running, let's change the metaphor and invite young adults to join the orchestra. As we sit together, we can help them learn to play their instruments—while they help us learn the music of the emerging world, which they hear more clearly than we do. Together we can compose something lovelier and more alive than the current cacophony, something in which dissonance has a place but does not dominate.

Quote - [Parker J. Palmer](#)

Old age is no time to hunker down, unless disability demands it. Old is just another word for nothing left to lose, a time of life to take bigger risks on behalf of the common good.