

## **Guide for Small Group Discussion and Reflection**

### ***Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife***

**By Barbara Bradley Hagerty**

This guide is intended to provide questions for small group discussion. Additionally, there are exercises to supplement your group experience and help you to reflect upon the book's insights in a more meaningful way. As with any formative group discussion, it is wise to establish and agree upon small group guidelines. Suggestions for convening your group, including sample guidelines, can be found at the conclusion of this guide.

#### **PART 1: THE ADVENTURE OF MIDLIFE**

##### **Chapters 1-3**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Hagerty begins her book by sharing a story of how she woke up to discover that she was in midlife. Briefly share an experience, event, or circumstance that caused you to awaken to being in midlife.
2. What expectations or myths do we commonly carry about midlife? How does contemporary research challenge them (p. 20)?
3. What is actually happening at midlife (p. 22)?
4. Hagerty describes a Facebook question that evoked an array of responses (p. 23): "How is midlife treating you? Tell us something about your transition through midlife (forty-five to sixty-five) and how you've bounced back from life's curve balls." How would you respond to this question? Share briefly.
5. Hagerty describes the U-shaped happiness curve (p. 27). According to research, most people suffer a dip in happiness in midlife. What leads to this dip? What helps shift people into a more satisfied, contented place?
6. Hagerty observes that, "Those who flourish view their new aches and forgetfulness, the losses and indignities and tragedies that mark this stage, with the weathered perspective of survivors" by laughing at themselves and deriving meaning from what they have (pp. 30-31). Do you have someone in your life that seemingly flourished at midlife? How would you describe his/her perspective? What wisdom

does it offer you?

7. What does it mean to be “maintaining engagement with the world” (p. 42)? How can one do that?
8. Hagerty writes, “A good midlife is an intentional one” (p. 41). What does it mean to be intentional? What choices contribute to crafting an intentional life?

### **FOR YOUR PRIVATE REFLECTION**

- Hagerty writes about the importance of marking “mental milestones” that help you slow down and reflect upon key moments in life to be savored (p.12). List some key snapshots in your life that you savor.
- Create a U-shape on a piece of paper representing the U-shaped happiness curve. List some external life events (e.g., health scare, job loss, births, deaths) and internal life events (e.g., something that wells up from within, an inner restlessness or discontent) that have impacted your happiness. Where are you now on that happiness curve?
- How can you craft an intentional life? What choices are important to you?

## **PART 2: REALIGNING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Chapters 4 and 6**

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What kinds of shifts do you see in your relationships at this stage of your life?
2. How are your friendships in your midlife or second half of life different from those from earlier in your life?
3. How do friends boost our health (p. 94)? Have you found that to be true in your life? How so?
4. Hagerty describes the different layers or circles of friendships (p. 105). Do you find this pattern in your own life? Why are they constantly changing?
5. At this point in your life, what are the important characteristics of a quality friendship?
6. Does it surprise you that a study found that people between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five are the loneliest people in the United States? How does one counteract

loneliness?

7. What role does novelty have in infusing new energy into a seasoned marriage (p. 157)? Discuss practical ideas for how couples can infuse novelty into their relationship.
8. What insights did Hagerty discover for reviving marriages that are worn and damaged (p. 196)? Can you add any based on your observations about life?
9. Hagerty explores the need to realign relationships with friends and marriages. Consider other relationships such as relationships with children and with God or with your understanding of the divine. How might these relationships be shifting?

### **FOR YOUR PRIVATE REFLECTION**

- What characteristics comprise a “quality” friendship at this point in your life? List the people that embody these characteristics.
- What relationships would you like to inject new life into? How might you be able to do that?
- What steps can you take to invest in your friendships? Commit to these steps.
- What friendships have shifted over time and are no longer serving you well?

## **PART 3: FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING**

### **Chapters 5, 7-10**

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does it mean “to have a purpose in life” (p. 127)? Give some practical examples of someone who has purpose in life, including some from the book. How did bicycling provide purpose for the author and for Mike Adsit?
2. How does having purpose impact our brain and our long-term health (pp. 126-136)?
3. Discuss the two kinds of happiness and intrinsic and extrinsic goals (pp. 129-131). Can you relate to this in your own life?
4. What did you learn about resilience as you read the story of Bob Stifel (p. 236)? How is resilience strengthened (pp. 238-240)?
5. How have stressful events made you stronger? What lessons have you learned?
6. What is generativity (pp. 272-275)? Discuss the notion of “platinum generativity.” How do you see these concepts in in your own life? Discuss some practical examples,

both large and small.

7. What makes volunteering meaningful and good for you (pp. 300-303)?
8. In Chapter 10, Hagerty describes the need to re-channel one's energies into something that gives him/her meaning and verve and she tells the stories of several people who have successfully done that. How have you experienced that in your own life? Can you relate to any of the stories?
9. How do we recognize, name, and claim our signature qualities, talents, and personality traits that describe our essence or *Sosein* (p. 326)?

### **FOR YOUR PRIVATE REFLECTION**

- What is currently giving you joy and meaning in your life? Is there something that you are wondering about trying for the first time—perhaps a hobby or an activity?
- What stressful events in your life have made you stronger, helping to build your resilience?
- What is your essence or *Sosein*? Identify your natural talents, signature qualities, and personality traits. Ask trusted friends or family members to help you identify them.
- Ponder how you can exercise your altruism and cultivate your platinum generativity. What skills, passions, and qualities have you honed over the past several decades that you can share through volunteering to make the world a better place?

## **PART 4: CHOOSING TO FLOURISH**

### **Epilogue and Afterword**

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What inspired, surprised, or challenged you about the book?
2. How will the insight you have gained from the book change the way you approach life?
3. According to George Valliant, “Even a hopeless midlife can blossom into a joyous old age” (p. 40). What offers you hope at this stage of your life?
4. How do you intend to approach the second half of life?

5. Hagerty writes, “Flipping the switch from autopilot to engagement demands intention, energy, and effort every single day” (p. 356). What practices will help you to stay engaged in this work? Make a commitment to these practices.
6. Which of the sixteen suggestions in the afterword are calling to you at this stage? What suggestions would you add to your list?

### **FOR YOUR PRIVATE REFLECTION**

- In what areas of your life are you currently on “autopilot”?
- What qualities do you intend to cultivate in your life right now? What kind of person do you want to be? Write down your thoughts. Using those thoughts, create an intention statement for this stage of your life. Intention statements are present tense, use positive wording, and generally contain no more than two sentences. They often begin with statements such as “I am” or “I choose.”

\*\*\*\*\*

**Created by Mabeth Hudson**  
**Co-founder, Well for the Journey | [wellforthejourney.org](http://wellforthejourney.org)**  
**[Mabeth.hudson@gmail.com](mailto:Mabeth.hudson@gmail.com)**

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CONVENING YOUR GROUP

### Preparing for your Small Group Discussion

- Consider placing a simple candle or other symbol in the middle of the group on a center table.
- Ring a bell or chimes to bring the group together.
- Provide a minute of silence to center the group.
- Establish small group guidelines such as those below. Modify them or add your own as you desire.

### Sample Small Group Guidelines

**Confidentiality.** What others share while we are together should stay confidential. You are free to share your own experiences, insights, and learning with others.

**Listening.** Try to listen with your heart when others are speaking. Avoid interrupting and cross talking. Silence is a valuable listening tool.

**Respect.** Receive what others offer, recognizing and honoring each person's uniqueness. Avoid judging or criticizing others.

**Speaking.** Speak for yourself from your own heart and experience, resisting the urge to offer too much explanation. Let others speak for themselves. Avoid attempts to fix another's problems.

**Cell phones.** Please silence or turn off your cell phones.



