

A CELEBRATION OF SEX AFTER 50

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Chapter 20

Old Dogs Learn More Tricks: Making Choices for Passionate Change

Remember the formula for this final stage of the life span and how aging is not a choice—but our response is:

Changes bring **challenges**, which present us with **choices** that can lead to creative **solutions**.

As we have encouraged throughout the book, our attitudes and subsequent *choices* make the difference in whether our aging *challenges* fork into the high road (creative solutions) or the low road (negative existence). Our many transitions sexually bring complex challenges that motivate us into becoming great detectives to find creative solutions. This will be especially true of

menopause, pesky arthritis, bouts of impotence, and many other things we have dealt with in this book.

How fascinating that in our mature years we can be content and whole, rather than rigid old fogies who bark at everybody and can't adapt. Mature people adapt more readily from a place of wisdom, not wanting to repeat mistakes. Old dogs indeed learn more tricks because we desire and can more easily achieve a deeper quality of life.

As you ponder the joys of growing older, remember that *maturity is not a given with age*. Everyone ages, but becoming mature is an individual process that involves many choices and much growing up. All of us know immature sixty-year-olds in whom the lessons of life haven't created wisdom. Pondering what it means to grow wise and not just grow old brings some fascinating issues to the table. In this concluding chapter, let's consider some of the characteristics of mature people.

SEVEN TRAITS OF THE TRULY MATURE PERSON

Here are seven traits we think must be cultivated to bring about the paradigm shift into new concepts for enjoying these mature years. Maturity can be the catalyst for a deeper sexual intimacy and a greater enjoyment of lovemaking.

1. *Maturity lives gracefully with ambiguity, mess, mistakes, and humanness. Maturity accepts, forgives, and moves on more easily and graciously.* Have any of our lives turned out the way we planned? I doubt it. In youth, life can be black and white without shades of gray. This world is sinful

and fallen, and we are fallible humans. Maturity graciously accepts others, forgives, and cuts people slack. Perfection need not be achieved for comfortable compromise and joyful living.

As we accept the complexities of life, we discover that this place of dissonance and confusion is used by God to launch us into some marvelous blessings and solutions. Control is an illusion. Accepting uncertainty and the possibility of mistakes is the initial step into growth. Old age tolerantly moves through the mess to claim joys and victories. As that famous philosopher Jimmy Buffett states, "Some of it's magic, some of it's tragic, but I had a good life all the way."

Sexual intimacy is full of difficulty and humanness. Maturity allows a husband to make love joyously to his wife who has had a mastectomy or is working through a terrible menopause. Orgasms may not feel like a volcano, but the excitement can still flood our bodies and relationships. Shifts and choices keep the warmth and passion present in new and deeper ways. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it can be comfortable and tenderly connecting.

2. Maturity postpones immediate pleasure for long-term gain. An adolescent in tenth grade has a difficult time understanding that a failed math test could impact a semester's grade and in turn his choice of colleges. The Saturday dance seems all important, but maturity knows the importance of delayed gratification. As the old preacher Bob Jones used to emphasize, "Never sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate."

There is more to life than just today, and perspective

quiets the drama. Old age can more easily distinguish between a 2 and a 10 in order of importance. Some hills aren't worth dying on. Maturity is less reactive to the temporary and works to achieve long-term goals.

We keep our precious grandbaby most every Wednesday night. I [Doug] was looking forward to enjoying some intimate time together this past Thursday morning before Caitlyn woke up—only to be interrupted by cries of, "Papa, Papa, come get me." We thought those days of postponement were over. These and other delayed gratifications come easier, especially if they promote needed intimacy. Maturity allows us to foresee that helping a mate through a health crisis may take precedence over personal gratification—only to discover new levels of passion.

3. *Maturity knows how to suffer graciously and embrace reality (the rules)—especially our own mortality.* Accepting losses then grieving and moving through them becomes an accepted and expected way of life, which opens the door to new opportunities. Christians can somehow get into a mind-set that says suffering means God has withdrawn His blessing. Jesus knew that this is a broken world and actually God draws His children closer through suffering. He emphasized, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4 NIV). The changes of aging, especially sexual, can incorporate some losses. Again, these challenges also bring choices for new depths of sexual intimacy.

Youth believes they are ten feet tall and bulletproof—natural consequences can be avoided. Maturity knows the rules apply—we're born, we live, we die. Accepting

mortality creates a profound understanding of the circle of life. This can motivate us to finish strong and more deeply enjoy each moment of the final years, not losing valuable time to fear, envy, and regret.

Sexual intimacy in aging accepts losses and learns how to play through the physical disabilities. We don't have to keep a happy face but can cry over losing our favorite position of intercourse to arthritis. In our later years, sex may occur without orgasms, and loving looks and touch may take precedence over intercourse.

4. *Maturity understands the importance of intimacy and creating a quality of life. Maturity sees life and success as a process—not a goal.* You know that old story of having never heard a person on their deathbed wishing they could have spent more time at work. With age and wisdom comes a shifting of priorities and values. Being with your mate, relaxing with friends, spending time with the grandchildren, and playing golf with buddies take on new significance.

The busyness of life and surviving take precedence in younger years. This hectic pace detracts from quality of life and availability to intimacy. Maturity starts to achieve balance. Relationships become more important than accruing more assets, and achievements are measured on God's scales as to what lives we have touched. It's a different measuring stick of success and where to sink energy.

Vacationing creates many natural aphrodisiacs. Holding hands and much time spent together with fewer interruptions, an anticipation of intimate times—all these can be a part of older empty-nest companionship. Creating a priority for sharing lives and enjoying long-awaited dreams bring couples closer together.

5. Maturity builds wonderfully rich sexual intimacy. We mentioned earlier that a case could be made that intimate lovemaking is wasted on those less than fifty years of age. Scripture uses the word *know* for sexual love-making. Maturity has the kind of accepting and understanding wisdom necessary to truly know a mate. This will be much more likely to occur at fifty than at thirty.

6. Maturity has incorporated God's gift of self-esteem with a true servant's heart. Scripture encourages servanthood—that ability to reach out beyond our own desires to meet the needs of another. We are asked to submit ourselves one to another. This loving humility is based on a maturity of being comfortable in our own skin and acknowledging God's verdict that each of us is uniquely and wonderfully made (see Ps. 139:14). From that strong place of self-acceptance, we have nothing to prove.

Sexual intimacy flourishes when two psychologically whole people can relax in their own bodies and revel in their sexual feelings. Each lover can comfortably nurture the other and enjoy creating sexual arousal and fulfillment in their partner. Mature lovers are comfortable in their own skin and tenderly meet one another's needs.

7. Maturity recognizes the importance of faith and God's loving, wise perspective. Aging brings us closer to heaven and eternity. Jesus, redemption, and an eternal perspective give us the ability to face our mortality and death with a peace that conquers the unknown. Aging brings with it much uncharted territory and unpredictable challenges. God promises to be there with comfort and purpose, and we learn wonderful ways to crawl up into the lap of the Almighty: "He who dwells in the shelter

of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1 NIV).

God's love and eternal purpose grow sweeter with maturity. His wisdom can permeate our lives in wonderful ways that make us enjoy relationships even more. Grandparenting, friendships, and mentoring take on whole new meanings. Drawing nearer to God brings us closer to each other.

We hope you will work to become increasingly more mature—not just older. These are marvelous years of sexual celebration and deep intimacy. We know that just reading a book is never enough. I [Doug] come from a Baptist background, and we always had altar calls at the end of presentations. This was a time of coming forward and making decisions and changes around what we had just heard. Let us make an altar call with some final suggestions for applying this book.

Afirming your choices for a loving companionship and greater, sexual intimacy:

1. Keep a log of time spent together as a couple—how could you increase this in the coming months?
2. Go over old pictures and memories and affirm your history and traditions.
3. As you have read this book, which area of your marital intimacy have you discovered is the strongest, and which needs the most changes?
4. If your mate would read and apply only one chapter in the book—which one would you choose? Which one would they choose for you?

5. Think through the chapter your mate chose for you and the areas needing the most changes. Pick three challenges that you choose to change into more positive solutions.

May God give you the wisdom and courage during this wonderful time of life to create a true celebration of sex. Remember to keep making those choices!

Changes bring challenges, which present us with choices that can lead to creative solutions.