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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

HOW
TO AGE

without

GETTING
OLD

THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TODAY TO
STAY YOUNG FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

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JOYCE MEYER



New York • Nashville

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INTRODUCTION

Can you remember being very young and looking at someone in their fifties or sixties and saying, “She is *old!*” When we are in our teens or twenties, we cannot imagine being seventy-five years old. But eventually, we probably will be. The years pass for everyone. Some people navigate the changes associated with growing older gracefully, but many do not. Fearing, dreading, or refusing to admit that the aging process is happening doesn’t eliminate it. Worrying about it or ignoring it certainly doesn’t make aging any easier but, in fact, makes it more challenging.

I firmly believe that we should enjoy all the years that God gives us. In order to do so, we need to prepare for life’s latter years. The earlier we begin this preparation, the easier it will be and the better the results will be.

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During our young adult years and even into middle age, we are full of dreams and plans for the future. We’re usually not thinking about getting older. Somehow, we mistakenly believe we will always be young. My youngest child just turned forty years old, and none of us can believe the baby of the family is forty! However, he

is, and he may find that being this age requires some minor changes and adjustments.

Not wanting to think about growing older is understandable, but problems arise when people are unwilling to make the changes each new season of life calls for and persist in being unwise in managing their health and their time. “Busy” is the disease of the twenty-first century, and it causes stress. If stress is ignored for too long, it will have long-term or even permanent negative effects on how we feel and what we are able to do as we grow older.

We can learn from the experiences of those who have gone before us, and I hope this book will provide some lessons from my life for you. My goal in these pages is to share

I would like you to say aloud right now, “I will not fear or dread the years ahead.”

openly the experiences and knowledge I have gained over the years in regard to aging. My hope is that it will help you avoid some of the mistakes I have made so that you can age

well. We can do nothing about adding one year to our age every twelve months, but there is *a lot* we can do to keep from “getting old.”

I would like you to say aloud right now, “Someday I am going to be seventy-five years old, and then eighty and perhaps ninety, depending on how many years God gives me. I will not fear or dread the years ahead.”

No matter how young you are right now, I think it is important to think about your latter years. Let me encourage

you to look forward to them and believe that even though life will be different when you are older, it can still be very, very good.

You may notice as you read that I have not filled this book with pages of statistics on aging. You can access those easily by searching the Internet if you are interested in them. I have found some of them to be very negative. I don't want to expect my body and mind to break down at a certain age because that's what the experts predict. I want to see what God does with me. I believe that He has an individual plan for each of us and for the course of our lives. If we follow His guidance, we will end up at the right place at the right time.

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Before you read further, let me challenge you to ask yourself an important question: Will you simply let yourself "get old," or will you age gracefully, purposefully, and wisely, allowing God to use you in every season of your life? If you will, I believe your latter years can be absolutely wonderful.

**“KEYS TO JOY AT ANY AGE:
LIVE SIMPLY.
GIVE GENEROUSLY.
RECEIVE GRACIOUSLY.
STAY GRATEFUL.”**

—

P.C.F.

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE, PART 1

There's a beauty and wisdom to experience that cannot be faked.

Amy Grant

If I were to ask you to share your life experiences with me, how would the conversation unfold? Would you tell me stories of a happy childhood, recount your dreams and disappointments, or show me photos of your family? Would you reminisce about the challenges you've overcome and the lessons you've learned? Would I hear you speak about your life with gratitude for all that God has done for you? Would I perceive fear or anxiety about the days to come, or would I hear peace, faith, and positivity in your attitude toward the future? Everyone's life experience is different, and God can use it all. In this chapter and the next one, I'd like to share some of the experiences that have led me to write this book.

A LONG JOURNEY BEGINS

I was abused sexually by my father on a regular basis throughout my childhood and teenage years. I am sure that the stress of that experience stole a lot of my energy before I ever had a chance to use it properly. For years, I thought that my being strong and determined got me through those terrible years of abuse, but I now realize it was God who gave me the strength to keep going.

I can remember not feeling well at different times throughout my life, beginning at about age eighteen. I left home as soon as I was legally old enough to do so, and I married at age eighteen—interestingly, the same year I began facing challenges with my health. There's no way to characterize my first marriage except to say that it was bad and extremely stressful. On two occasions, my husband abandoned me. I also had to deal with his many extramarital affairs, his lack of employment, and his habit of stealing.

I soon found myself going to doctors, asking why I did not feel well so much of the time. They tried to tell me that my physical symptoms were stress related, but I refused to accept "stress" as a real diagnosis. The reason that any mention of stress, nerves, or an emotional connection to the way I felt physically was unacceptable to me is that my mother had trouble with anxiety throughout her life and finally experienced a nervous breakdown. I thought being susceptible to stress meant that I was weak and could not handle life, and I did not want anyone to view me that way.

I now suspect that excessive stress is the culprit behind

many health problems. I have personally experienced stress-related health conditions and have known other people who have experienced them, too. I will elaborate on the connection between stress and health throughout this book, but for now, let me simply say that the symptoms of many illnesses are real, but their root cause—or at least a strong contributor to many of them—is stress.

After getting a divorce at the age of twenty-two, I was alone in the world with my first child. With no one to turn

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to for help, I lived in a constant state of low-level fear and worry. I could ask my father for help, but I knew that would mean suffering more abuse, so I avoided it as long as I possibly could. I finally did have to move back home for a short period of time, during which I met and married Dave. He was and always has been a patient and loving man, but I was so dysfunctional and my soul was so wounded because of my past that I didn't know how to enjoy Dave or anything else in life. I didn't realize that all the stress I had been through had taken a toll on my body. Yet because I was still young and had the energy that young people enjoy, I pressed on, despite dealing with increasing physical issues.

BUSIER AND BUSIER

When Dave and I married, he adopted my son, David, and we quickly had two more babies, both girls. Within a few

years, we had three children all under six years old, lived in a small apartment that consisted of three rooms, and had barely enough money to get by. When we decided we wanted to buy our first home, I had to get a job to make the purchase possible, so I added the stress of working full-time on top of trying to do everything else the life of a young wife and mother required. I drank way too much coffee, smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, slept about six hours a night, and was upset about something most of the time. Although I didn't know it at the time, I also had a birth defect in my right hip. My hip joint was oblong instead of round, so it didn't fit properly and caused me back problems that started when I was a teenager. Thankfully, that was eventually taken care of through a hip replacement, but not until 2017. From my teenage years until my early seventies, I had back pain and was constantly going to the chiropractor for adjustments.

Although I had believed in Jesus since I was a child, I lacked a real relationship with Him for many years. But in 1976, when I was thirty-three years old, this began to change. God drew me to Himself and gave me a love and passion for studying His Word. As a result, I began to realize that I needed a lot of change in my life in order to solve the problems with which I struggled. Over a period of many years, while I received a lot of healing from Him in my soul and aspects of my life got better, I still didn't know how to rest. I could barely speak the words *I can't*. I had deep insecurities, and I thought my worth and value came from what I produced through hard work, so most of the time I worked.

By the time I was thirty-six, Dave and I had our fourth

child, and God had called us into ministry. Starting anything new is usually a lot of hard work, and ministry is no different. We started with nothing, and over a forty-year period, by God's grace, we have built an international ministry that reaches around the world via television, other media, books, conferences, and speaking engagements.

As both my family and the ministry grew, I constantly worked not only physically but also internally, by worrying, planning, thinking, reasoning, and pondering the teachings I prepared. Most of us can live that way for a period of time, but sooner or later it catches up with us, and life gets harder and harder. I recall the first time I got really sick. I had no energy for anything, but through eating healthily and making a few changes in my lifestyle, I recovered fairly quickly. However, I didn't learn anything from the experience, so I simply kept doing what I had always done and eventually got sick again. We cannot keep doing the same thing over and over and expect to get different results.

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HEADACHES AND HORMONES

When I was in my forties, I began having migraine headaches associated with hormonal changes, and they lasted for about ten years. Some experts say that unbalanced hormones cause stress, and others say that stress causes unbalanced

hormones. Either way, stress is something we must recognize and deal with. In my opinion, excessive stress is a cause of unbalanced hormones—or if it is not *the* cause, at the very least it magnifies the problem.

It is very important for a woman to be in good health when she enters into the change of life. For most women, this happens between the ages of forty-five and fifty-five, but it begins in some women as early as their thirties or forties and

Why do some go through the change so easily while others suffer quite a bit?

in some as late as sixty. I have noticed just from watching my friends that some women have no problems at all with the change. They simply stop hav-

ing their periods and go on with life. But others have many problems. Hot flashes, weight gain, night sweats, sleep disturbances, mood changes, irritability, headaches, and simply not feeling well are all common symptoms. Why do some go through the change so easily while others suffer quite a bit? I think part of the reason lies in the condition of their general health when the change of life hits and how much stress they live under.

I had a very difficult time with the change of life because I was already depleted of energy and nutrition when it began. I was also under a lot of stress from my past and the hard work required in beginning the ministry. I have an adrenal adenoma or adrenal dysplasia (the adrenal glands control the hormones in our bodies). This means I have a small, noncancerous growth on my left adrenal gland. Doctors have advised me not to have it removed because of the danger of doing

so. I have read that some physicians say an adrenal adenoma causes no problems at all, but my doctor believes that it does affect the release of hormones in my body and has caused some of the problems I have experienced.

I have a strong personality and lots of determination, so although I didn't always feel good, I pressed on. One doctor told me that my mind was stronger than my body, meaning that no matter how bad I felt or how tired I was, I had the ability just to keep going.

The only way I know to describe how I felt during those years is that I couldn't relax, I struggled often with those terrible headaches, and I was exhausted. Once again, the doctor said it was stress, but I refused to take any medicine that might help me. After all, I was strong in the Lord and believed in His healing power, so I kept pushing.

*My mind was stronger
than my body.*

TWO HEALTH CRISES WITHIN FIVE YEARS

In 1980, I had a hysterectomy because of excessive bleeding and pain. In approximately 1985, I had a regular breast checkup as part of an annual doctor's visit, and to my utter surprise I found out I had a cancerous tumor. Thankfully, the mass was small. However, it was a fast-growing, estrogen-dependent tumor, so I needed a mastectomy because surgery was the preferred treatment at the time. Because my lymph nodes were clear, I didn't have to have radiation or

chemotherapy, for which I was and am still extremely thankful. Each year when I hear that my mammogram is clear, I am very grateful. More than thirty years have passed since that particular health challenge, and I thank God for every one of them.

The hysterectomy caused me to enter the change of life early. Due to the breast cancer, I could not take hormones to help with the discomfort of menopause, and I had a very difficult time with it. But during these health challenges, I never stopped long enough to let my body rest or heal properly. I tried to relax when I wasn't doing conferences, but even when I sat in a chair or lay down to rest, I stayed busy internally. I never allowed my soul (my mind, will, and emotions)

I never allowed my soul to rest. I was always thinking, planning, worrying, and trying to make decisions.

to rest. I was always thinking, planning, worrying, and trying to make decisions.

By that time, the ministry had grown larger, and we had even opened offices in several

countries outside the United States because of our broad television outreach. We employed approximately nine hundred people, who needed and expected paychecks, and I saw no option but to keep going because our income depended on my speaking schedule. At least I thought it did. My schedule during that season was so full that I was rarely home for more than a few days. I had waited so long for opportunities to teach God's Word that I viewed each one as a door God had opened for me.

While it is true that God does open doors of opportunity

for us, it is also true that every door that opens isn't necessarily one that He wants us to walk through. We are to use wisdom regarding what we agree to do or choose not to do. In my book *In Search of Wisdom*, I mention a specific way one of my friends uses wisdom concerning her commitments:

I once asked a friend in ministry how she decided which speaking invitations to accept and which to decline. She told me that before she responded to an invitation, she thought through every detail of what it would take for her to do it. She thought about matters such as how long she would be away from home, what kind of preparation time she would need to invest, and how far she would have to travel. Although these are all logistical questions and not ministry-related ones, she was wise to ask them. If we do not ask wise questions, we may agree to do something and then later complain about it and dread doing it because we did not consider the details involved in it. It is always better to pray and think about a commitment before giving an answer.

While it is true that God does open doors of opportunity for us, it is also true that every door that opens isn't necessarily one that He wants us to walk through.

I wish I had known what my friend knew during those days when my schedule was so packed. I stayed extremely busy—too busy, in fact—because I had not yet learned to

say no. People who cannot say no when needed will usually end up with overloaded calendars and experience the effects of stress. The main reason many people overcommit is that they want to please others, but we must be God-pleasers, not people-pleasers.

During those years, I didn't feel bad all the time, but certainly more than I should have. I loved teaching God's Word, and I still do. I was full of dreams and visions for the future and very passionate about everything I did. When we are passionate about something, that passion gives us the determination to do whatever needs to be done in order to accomplish it. My joy in being able to teach God's Word and help

*We must be God-pleasers,
not people-pleasers.*

people was greater than any physical discomfort, so I generally ignored the way I felt.

Maybe you can relate to my story in many ways. I am sharing openly with you about my life behind the scenes so that, if you feel the same, you will know that you are not alone and that you too can find answers and live an enjoyable, fruitful life.

“I would encourage younger people to remember these things as they age:

- Make time with God a daily priority.
- Take good care of your body and love yourself the way God made you.
- Learn to laugh at yourself.
- Pray always, turning things over to God and trusting Him.
- Slow down and take time for the little things, because the days pass quickly.
- Make dinner or mealtime special as your family sits down together and shares their day.
- Try to keep up with technology and use it to your advantage.
- You may have aches and pains, but don't dwell on them or burden others by complaining. They come with age!”

—
S.C.H.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE, PART 2

Experience is the best teacher.

Latin Proverb

Many well-intentioned people make unwise decisions, experience negative results, and don't understand why. As you can see from reading the previous chapter, I was one of them for years. My intentions were good. I wanted to please God and help people, but I had to realize that working constantly, never taking a day off or a real vacation, and living with barely enough energy to function was not sustainable.

NO ONE IS INVINCIBLE

During the years I worked so hard and stayed so busy, I mistakenly thought that I was invincible, so I kept working harder and harder. I taught and hosted twenty-four to thirty-six

conferences each year, and each conference included four or five sessions. Each year, I wrote two or three books, committed to approximately twenty speaking engagements, and did twelve chapel services for our employees. I also did television and radio interviews, along with book signings. Eventually, I added foreign mission trips to my schedule. By that time, I had three teenagers and a toddler.

I look back now and have no idea how I was able to do it all, but I did enjoy the ministry and felt my life was bearing good fruit. God blessed the ministry and gave us favor, and we grew quite quickly. I can truthfully say that all I did was work, and I felt the effects of my schedule more each decade. Then, as I began to reach my senior years, I began feeling its impact differently than ever before. I was less of a visionary, I felt tired physically, and I was weary in my soul. I was also more stressed than ever, and life seemed to be getting more and more difficult.

At the age of sixty-two, I finally began working out with a trainer three days a week and made an effort to eat more healthily. I did start to feel better, so naturally I continued doing what I had always done, which was work. I taught some good messages during that season on entering the rest of God, but I realize now that I did not apply to my own life the truths I taught to others in those messages.

During that season, I also began walking five miles a day and continued doing so for almost three years. The walking gave me energy, but I pushed too hard, not taking any days off. During that time, I had two hip replacements, but during the recovery period I rested only as much as I absolutely had

to and went right back to the walking, exercise, and working, working, and working some more!

I wish I'd had a good book on how to take care of myself or had listened to the people who kept telling me I needed to rest, but sadly I didn't. I had to learn by experience. That is usually the most painful way to learn, but it is often the most valuable, because we rarely forget the lessons we learn by going through things.

I FELL APART

I now realize that for years my body tried to warn me that something was going seriously wrong, but I was too busy to pay any attention to the distress signals. One morning in December 2017, I woke up and something had happened in my mouth. It was horribly dry and felt as though it had been scalded. My stomach hurt and I was nauseated. I felt weak and shaky, and my blood pressure was very high. To make a long story short, after seeing three doctors (one of whom said the problem was in my mind and recommended classes on how to control my thoughts) and going to a hospital, where I had every test possible, I received a report. I was told I was very healthy and in good condition for a woman of my age (then seventy-three), but that I had extreme adrenal fatigue. The doctor wrote me a prescription for medication to help with the stress, and I knew I could easily manage taking the medicine each day. But the medicine was not all I

needed. The doctor also prescribed resting for at least eighteen months! I could do only what I absolutely had to do, he said, *and nothing else*. My family ended up needing to tell me what I absolutely had to do, because I thought I absolutely had to do everything I was doing.

The thought of resting for eighteen months made my mind go blank. I had no idea how to do that! For many of us, rest must be learned; it doesn't come naturally to us. Thankfully, my family intervened, and we delegated many of my responsibilities to other people. I taught at my conferences, did my television show, and wrote my books. I also did a few other things that only I could do, but mainly I began to learn how to rest and how to let people help me. I have now learned a lot, and I am still learning. I know myself, and while I will always lean toward working, I am definitely attempting to maintain more balance in my life. In fact, I think that right now I have the best schedule I have ever had in my life.

You may feel great and think something such as adrenal fatigue could never happen to you, but I assure you that it could. God created the world in six days and on the seventh day, He rested (Genesis 2:2). God rested! How could someone who never gets tired need to rest? Perhaps God never gets tired because He does rest. He does not slumber or sleep, according to Psalm 121:4, but I believe He lives in a continual state of rest. God did look at everything He had created and declared it to be good (Genesis 1:31). He took time on that seventh day to enjoy the work He had done on the other

six days. We need to follow that example. What is the point in spending our lives working hard at something if we never take time to enjoy the fruit of our labor?

God commanded a Sabbath rest for the people of Israel. Not only did the people receive the instruction to rest, even the land had to rest one out of seven years (Leviticus 25:4). Some people reading this will say, “That is an Old Testament situation. We don’t live under those laws because we have a New Covenant under the grace of God.”

While we do live under the New Covenant, the principle of needing to rest is just as valid today as it was in Old Testament times. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). God gives the Sabbath to us as a gift, and too many people have never opened it. We might say that we owe our bodies one day a week to rest so

God commanded a Sabbath rest for the people of Israel.

we can navigate the other six days with vitality and energy.

By the time I finally realized what I had done to myself at the end of 2017, I owed my body hundreds of Sabbaths. Perhaps you do, too. If we never rest, we spend too much of our energy in the early years of our lives and then have no energy left for the latter years because we have already spent it all. Thankfully, God is a gracious healer. No matter what we have lost, God can help us recover. The psalmist writes, “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree” and “They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Psalm 92:12, 14). I am trusting God for this

promise to be a reality in my life, and I hope you will trust Him to do the same in your life, too.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

As I write this book, I can look back a couple of years and see that I have made some very positive changes. I am much better than I was, but I know that I have to make permanent changes in my lifestyle. I realize that I am no longer twenty years old—or thirty or forty, or even fifty or sixty. By the time this book is published, I will be seventy-eight, and I have finally admitted it to myself. That doesn't mean that God is finished with me, nor does it mean that I can't work any longer. I still work, but now I work smarter, not harder. I work less than I have ever worked in my entire life, and yet, as a ministry, by the grace of God we are bearing more fruit and reaching more people than ever.

Experience is a great teacher. Even Jesus learned through the things He experienced. According to Hebrews 5:8–9, He learned obedience through the things He suffered, and His experience qualified Him to be the Author and Source of our salvation. He was never disobedient, but the experience of being obedient taught Him and equipped Him. If nothing else, my experience has qualified me to bring this message to you and prayerfully, to help you through it.

*Now I work smarter,
not harder.*

EVERYONE'S EXPERIENCE IS DIFFERENT

We are all different, and everyone experiences aging differently, but we all do experience changes in our skin, stamina, time needed to recover after events, and other things. I asked a fifty-four-year-old woman who works for us if she had experienced any changes in her body in the past decade. She laughed and then said, "Oh, yes!" She said the main difference she has noticed is that she needs more time to recover from certain activities than she once did. If we pay attention to our bodies, they will help us know how and when to make changes, but if we ignore them, as I did, the result is not good.

Some people have more energy than others. They may have a faster metabolism, or they may be genetically predisposed to high energy. I spoke with our staff pastor, who is in his early sixties, and he said the only difference he sees in himself now compared to his younger years is that his metabolism is slower, and he must be more careful about how much he eats and what he eats in order to maintain his weight at a level he believes is right for him.

I believe that even our personalities play into how we feel. People who are outgoing and laugh a lot quite often feel well. Those who are more laid-back and not bothered by many things often have less stress than those who are uptight. They may also have more energy than others because they do not spend it unnecessarily. Dave is that kind of person. I am an aggressive type-A person who feels the need to solve

everyone's problems, and that requires mental and emotional energy. Those of us in ministry have to learn that we are not the saviors of the entire world. Instead, in each situation we face, we would be wise to learn what role we need to play and what we need to do—and then stick to it. That way, we will always have sufficient energy to do what we are called to do. This is my prayer for you, and I have written this book to help you accomplish it.

In each situation we face, we would be wise to learn what role we need to play and what we need to do—and then stick to it.