

FABULOUS
After 50

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Shirley W. Mitchell



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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FABULOUS AFTER 50

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www.fabulousafter50.com

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DEDICATION

To Karen, David, Angela, and Jay—I'm proud to be your mom—and to Michelle, Monica, Melissa, Stephanie, Sarah, and Jackson—the greatest grandchildren in the universe.

—Shirley W. Mitchell





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—Shirley W. Mitchell

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The Ageless Woman's Pledge

The ageless woman
pledges,
regardless of the past:

to feel,
to laugh,
to grieve,
to forgive,
to grow,
to change,
to be willing to be wrong,
to touch,
to serve,
to love.

This woman leaves
a trail of grace
and a legacy of joy,
at any age!

—Jane Rubietta

*For Shirley W. Mitchell,
my role model in victorious aging*



PREFACE

TORCHBEARERS INTO THE FUTURE

Four weeks before the opening of the Olympic Games, a lighted torch—a stick of wood dipped in tallow or oil and set ablaze at the end to provide light that can be carried about—is brought by relay runners from the valley of Olympia, Greece, where the original Games were held, to the host country. Ships and planes transport the Olympic torch over the seas and mountains.

At the opening ceremony, the final runner carries the torch into the stadium, makes a dramatic lap around the track, followed by all of the other participating athletes, and then lights the Olympic flame. As the flame transfers from the runner's torch to the stationary torch, the Olympic Games officially begin.

Fabulous After 50, written in the crucible of life, aims to ignite aging women with a passion to shape and change the future because we dare to dream. The flame of the future is a new mental posture for women that enables them to feel younger while growing older and to get better while aging.

The objective of *Fabulous After 50* is to provide emotional, spiritual, and psychological wisdom, support, and guidance for women moving into the second half of life. This book addresses every woman's longing to impact the lives of others, to make every moment count, and to leave a legacy of love. Through this

book and the attitude it fosters, I hope to defy society's bias that young is better. My desire is to give women mile markers for getting better, not just older, and to help all of us improve with age. To be enthusiastic about aging is almost an oxymoron; however, more and more mature women are becoming empowered to live their very best each day and are leading enjoyable, productive lives.

As expectations change for women, this book will propel them forward, clarify their calling, and give them more purposeful direction.

Fabulous After 50 covers a wide range of issues that concern women. This is a bookstore in a book, covering emotional and spiritual issues, as well as physical realities, such as proper diet, exercise, hormones, and menopause. Extensive research from secular and Christian sources gives balance to this book. At the end of each chapter is a section called "Questions for Immediate Application" to help women apply the practical principles from this book to their personal lives. This section also makes the book appropriate for discussions in the context of a small group or Bible study.

Chapter 9, "In the Jaws of Menopause," is an actual interview with James C. Upchurch, GYN., M.D., conducted as he guided me successfully through my own menopause. It will offer fresh hope as you approach this often-dreaded time.

My sister, Debra K. Goodwin, Registered Dietitian, guided me into healthy eating habits for a mature woman, and she will guide you, too, in chapter 7, "Debunking the Diet Mysteries: Eating Right."

After attending Dr. Ken Dychtwald's Age Wave Institute in New York, I caught his passion for making the latter years super years. The seed planted there in my fertile mind germinated into

this book. Dr. Walter M. Bortz II, author of *We Live Too Long and Die Too Short* and *Dare to Be 100*, put an indelible groove into my brain to “use it or lose it.”

I am delighted to invite you to run with the torch of ageless living into the future. I hope you will find life is truly *Fabulous After 50*.



CHAPTER 1

MAKE MIDLIFE PRIME TIME WITH A
POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD AGING

“As Boomers shed the skin of youth...they could be migrating into the most powerful years of their lives.”¹

—Dr. Ken Dychtwald, *Age Power*

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

—Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)

My best friend, Sarah, bounded up the steps of the jumbo jet, her agile body impressing me with its youthfulness. She appeared ageless. Sarah stopped at the top of the steps, turned, and smiled blithely. With a spirit of freedom, she waved and disappeared through the door of the plane.

Only I knew of the fierce struggle she’d encountered at midlife. Physical and emotional changes, including the darkness of depression, were now illuminated by energy, passion, and purpose. Opening the jaws of menopause and midlife had made her feel whole again, like a real woman. She even felt feminine. With the wisdom accrued from half a century of living, and with fewer family responsibilities, giving her more freedom to do the things she enjoyed, Sarah had begun experiencing the brightness and benefits of midlife.

Probably the happiest period in life most frequently is in middle age, when the eager passions of youth are cooled, and the infirmities of age not yet begun; so we see that the shadows, which are at morning and evening so large, almost entirely disappear at mid-day.²

Sarah, in choosing to be fabulous after 50, defies the most common misconception of midlife.

• THE MISCONCEPTION ABOUT MIDLIFE •

In a society that values youth and beauty, people often think of midlife as the time when the quality of both life and the body begin to deteriorate. We focus on a sagging jaw line, age spots, or a body that is constantly moving closer to the ground. But life is more than what we see, and life can be better after 50! Growing older can be fabulous if we approach this mile marker relying on the wisdom we have gained. Centuries ago, Publilius Syrus said, “It takes a long time to bring excellence to maturity.” Maturity and wisdom elevate us to a higher plateau in life for even greater contributions to our families, neighbors, societies, and communities, as well as to our local church.

These are the proving years—the years when we reap the benefits of living well and thoughtfully. As Jane O’Reilly put it,

Fifty is a time of final options, but it is also a culmination, the prime of life, the beginning of seeing how it all turns out. Let there be less marveling at our wonderful preservation and more respect for the maturity of our mind and spirit. After all, the most important mission of a woman’s life is not to hold on to her looks. Our mission is the same as a man’s...to grow up. To ignore that goal is to exclude women from adult responsibility. Fifty

is 50, and to deny that is to deny wisdom, experience and life itself.³

Perhaps, if you are approaching middle age, you are riding the waves of change that occur during this period, and feeling insecure. You may even be in the golden years, typically defined as age 65 and on. Despite changes in roles, careers, health, and relationships, we can always choose our outlook on aging and the many facets of growing older.

• POSITIVE AGING •

Dr. Ken Dychtwald has pioneered today's concept of aging. He is president and CEO of Age Wave, Inc., an education and communications firm that advises industry and government on the social, lifestyle, and business implications of an aging America. He said,

I've spent the last 20 years studying aging and older people....When I got involved in the aging field it was primarily concerned with the sorrows and woes of aging. And while the concern among the professionals in my field was real and important, it seemed to me that by primarily focusing on the difficulties of aging—the terrible problems and enfeeblements that later years may bring—we were not hearing from the other voice, the voice of a more positive aging. There are people in this country growing old well—with vigor, with power, with style, with an interest in living fully and being part of the American marketplace.⁴

His term “Age Wave” refers to the huge demographic shift beginning in 1996, when the leading edge of the baby boomers—the 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964—turned 50 and merged with seniors to create an enormous senior

society. Now, with millions of Americans over 50, positive aging is vital. In fact, there are more people over the age of 65 in the world today than at any other time in the history of the world put together.⁵

Einstein said, “Do not grow old, no matter how long you live. Never cease to stand like curious children before the Great Mystery into which we are born.” Whatever your age, it’s important to know that within every aging person lies hidden wealth.

• MINING FOR GOLD •

Like an unmined shaft, our depths gleam with nuggets of greatness. But having the potential for extraordinary achievements isn’t enough; gold does the mine owner little good locked deep inside the earth’s darkness. The nuggets must be mined, brought to the surface, taken through the fires of adversity, and polished to their peak of brilliance. This is no easy process. The refining process is difficult and painful, as Margaret Sharpe relates:

For six thousand dollars worth of gold, it was most unremarkable looking stuff, like coarse black-speckled sand in a Ziplock sandwich bag. It glinted only dully in the brilliant sunshine, giving no hint of its potential to look anything like the glittering baubles we see in the windows of jewelry shops.

After letting me feel the extraordinary weight of it, the prospector tossed the bag casually onto the dashboard of his pickup. It was his cut of the profits from a claim on Bonanza Creek which he was renting to another outfit.

I thought of a few lines from Robert Service’s poem “The Spell of the Yukon”:

I wanted the gold, and I sought it;
I scabbled and mucked like a slave.
Was it famine or scurvy—I fought it;
I hurled my youth into a grave.

I said, “So is this the stuff that men went mad trying to find?”

He gave a wry grin. “They still do. Everyone who comes here dreams of making it big.”

We drove to the local assaying and concentrating company—a couple of trailers and a plywood and plastic shack just off the main road. There the gold was weighed and later would be refined. The young man in charge was about to melt down another lot. His furnace consisted of an old propane gas cylinder with the top sawn off, connected to a tank of compressed gas. There was a lengthy wait as the mixture of propane and oxygen was lit and the furnace came up to temperature, glowing a fiery orange-red.

He mixed the unrefined gold in a crucible with—of all things—borax, and placed it in the furnace. When he poured the molten gold into a bar mould, a thick black scum hardened on the surface. This he knocked off with a hammer once the bar was solid. I expected to see a gleaming bar of pure gold, but it was dull with black and grayish speckles. “There’s still some iron in it,” he said, “I’ll have to do it again.”

While this was going on, a far less dramatic method of gold separation continued inside the plywood shelter. Utterly ordinary-looking sand, the residue of bigger refining operations, was poured through a hopper onto a constantly vibrating table, where several minerals,

including gold dust as fine as flour, were separated by specific gravity.

I couldn't imagine anything further removed from the activity of the massive bulldozers and sluicing machines we had seen operating out at Bonanza Creek itself, yet the goal was the same—to separate the gold from the worthless rock in which it is embedded, and to purify it.

There is nothing nice about the refining process. It is a dirty, messy job. The dross does not fall off but must be knocked off, piece by piece. Bulldozing ore produces tons of waste rock for each tiny ingot which is recovered. Even separating gold dust from sand requires a constant sweeping away of worthless minerals. The rewards for all that effort are certainly tangible for a successful prospector, who can hold six thousand dollars' worth of gold in the palm of his hand.

But God says that faith is more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire. Such faith is placed, not in the glittering brightness of gold or any other temporary thing, but in the eternal person and work of Jesus Christ, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (See 1 Peter 1:7, 18-19.)

God often uses the idea of refining precious metals as a picture of what he does to get rid of the dross in our lives—whether it be our pride, our lust, our love of material things—whatever keeps us from acknowledging our need for His love and forgiveness. He considers the

effort worthwhile, for the Bible tells us that Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. (See Hebrews 12:2.)

If you have placed your faith and trust in Him, you are a gift of God to His glorious Son, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. And He holds you in the palms of His hands, as infinitely more precious than gold.⁶

Unlike the so-called Gold Rush, where only an estimated thousand people actually struck gold, as we enter midlife we discover the vein of gold, the potential, running through every ageless person. We'll want to prospect! Digging and refining may look like revamping our vision, attaining a new understanding of our life purpose and gaining a revised outlook on the aging process.

In *Fabulous After 50*, we'll examine together the golden nuggets—the hidden wealth—of aging.

• REMOVING THE DROSS •

This wealth, unfortunately, is often hidden in the dross of a defeatist attitude. Just as gravity, sun, and time wrinkle the skin, so depression, worry, a broken spirit, and failure to dream can wrinkle the soul. Just because our eyesight is getting worse and our bodies are moving slowly south doesn't mean our spirits must drag lower and lower, as well.

At 50, we have unlimited potential to be fabulous, both of countenance and of spirit. We can make the most of the bodies and physical features we have—think of the value of a smile, regardless of wreaths of wrinkles!—while exercising great control over our spirit. Godly, healthy living, plus a positive attitude toward aging, can clear a path to fulfillment, happiness, health, and a rewarding state of satisfaction.

• THE KEY TO AGELESS LIVING •

Aging is inevitable. As we age, it is possible to sparkle like a jewel in the sun. With the proper mind-set, a positive attitude, a transcendent faith, and a practice of personal excellence, we'll become brighter. The marriage of experience and mature faith gives us the opportunity to enjoy a rich older life. Trusting God is the key to ageless living. In times of insecurity and fear, which seem to increase with age, I know I must trust God.

Don't allow the "old lady syndrome" to make you a shadow of the woman you are or could be. Some of our best and brightest women, though past the half-century mark in years, are climbing the ladder of success in the world—and the Stairmaster at the gym. This is the time to be bold, self-assured, empowered, and socially and politically aware. Viewing this time in our lives as a renewal is one way.

Renewal

Life is a series of renewals. Each morning opens the door on a fresh, just-born day. I take the gift of each sunrise as a new beginning, a time for God to renew me. Birthdays, too, can be renewals, offering the chance to start fresh with a clean slate, to revamp, to choose new areas of growth and exploration. Remember a "sweet 16"? To the teenager receiving her first driver's license, the world is bright and new and made just for her. Graduation, a further milestone along the lifeline, opens door after door to new starts: career, marriage, and family.

This is why Gail Sheehy calls midlife a "second adulthood." Middle age is another time of renewal in life, a season that may lead us to different activities, higher goals, and deeper relationships. And this is just the beginning!

Adventure

Turning a midlife crisis into a quest can be a special journey of new beginnings. Aging can be a voyage of discovery! After all, it wasn't until Christopher Columbus was in his early 40s that he made his first voyage to America. He made his voyage for God... for gold. When we adopt Christopher Columbus' adventurous spirit, our midlife years can have the Midas touch.

Dreaming is central to approaching midlife as an adventure. To begin this adventure, we must go to the nucleus of our hearts and spirits to let the real person shine through. By learning to listen to our heart's desires and allowing our Creator to be our compass, each of us will find our own guideposts of fulfillment as we follow our dreams. God has a special plan for each life, and He plants within us a dream to pursue it. Even after 50 years of life, we can begin to dream again.

A Race

In the Bible, the apostle Paul compares life to a race, in which we are all striving to obtain an incorruptible crown:

In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears. So fight to win. I'm not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise, I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.

(1 Corinthians 9:24-27 TLB)

While we're for the gold, however, the course in the aging race may well change! Previous generations followed what is called a linear lifestyle—moving through youth, getting an education, working at a single career until 65, and then rocking away in retirement while waiting for death. Recently, this linear lifestyle has fallen out of fashion. Retirement is a new concept, which may have contributed to the devaluing of aging people. B.F. Skinner made this point, saying,

For many people, old age begins with retirement.... Retirement is a modern idea. Until recently, as people grew older they simply did less and less of what they had always done, or turned to work that was easier. In 1870, in America, only one-quarter of the men over sixty-five were not working. A hundred years later, this figure was three-quarters. American women are “retiring” sooner, too. When families were larger, parents might be in their sixties before the last child left home. Today they may be no more than forty-five. When old age starts that soon, it lasts a long time.⁷

On the contrary, the cyclic lifestyle depicts a more helpful, healthful circular path, where one is free to begin again. And again. We may launch a new career or enter into a new personal relationship, maybe forging a whole new life in a new place during middle age. This cyclic lifestyle, and a new paradigm—that older is better—are sending many older women out to search for a new identity of power, style, and vigor.

Alice exemplifies this cyclic lifestyle. Her laser listening enabled her to hear the whisper of a dream in her heart. Though enjoying notable success in the educational field, she anticipates retirement with enthusiasm. Her passions for reading, writing, and traveling are coming together in a new dream career. She has mapped out plans for this adventure by combining her interests

and becoming a travel writer. Her mind is exploding with ideas and possibilities for the future. Her dreams have not turned gray or become wrinkled but rather are fresh, new, and vibrant.

Along with an enticing career change, this middle-aged lady is experiencing the great adventure of being a grandmother. For her, the autumn of life offers the prospect of being exciting, different, and even better than the first half.

A New Season

My home state of Alabama puts on a dazzling show during the fall season. God takes His brush and paints the leaves vibrant hues of scarlet, deep purple, sunshine yellow, and glowing orange. The landscape is as beautiful as a postcard. Just as the autumn of the year splashes bright colors everywhere, so does the autumn of life. Step out from the drab dryness of late summer to the color, panache, and wonder of this extraordinary life season!

Joseph Antonini, former chairman and CEO of K-Mart Corporation, said, "Life stage is more important than age!"

Carolyn Miller believes this to be true. The 1996 national president of the Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union agrees that life's stage—the quality of life and contributions made—is much more important than years lived.

Carolyn and I grew up together. We attended church each Sunday, giggling and whispering in the pews, then headed to her home. I would eat lunch with her family, and then we'd sprawl on the floor in front of the roaring fireplace and play Monopoly. Her spacious home was warm with love. In the evening, we always returned to church for the young people's group.

Four decades later, we reunited for lunch. The years that had passed vanished like snow under the intense heat of

sunshine as Carolyn and I caught up on the intervening time. She shared about her travels and her work helping women around the nation.

“What do you think is the secret of women being ‘fabulous after 50?’” I asked her.

“Love God, love yourself, love people.” She smiled. “I like people who are so inwardly fabulous that I don’t see their outside appearance. Likewise, I have met people who are fabulous-looking but are shallow on the inside. Age and external beauty are irrelevant to the fabulous after-50 woman.

“Fabulous women are good listeners and givers. They enjoy a balanced life. Fabulous 50-plus women will be imitators of Christ and also His ambassadors.”

Looking at this fabulous woman across the table, I knew she lived out her own philosophy. Her travels throughout the world, making speeches and attending countless committee meetings and functions, had forced her to live with integrity while continuing her career as a wife, mother, grandmother, and homemaker. Her ageless appeal broadened her meaningful contribution to the 1.7 million-member women’s group. She impressed me as a gracious lady whose real strength comes from the substance of her soul.

Leaving the restaurant that day, I realized Carolyn embraced life with exuberance. Undoubtedly she will relish it and live it to the fullest, giving no thought to age by numbers. Life is a stage, not an age. Putting God in the center of the stage to direct life at middle age—and at every age—is a win-win casting decision.

Carolyn’s brightness reminds me that age doesn’t dull our luster, because the shine comes from within, from the “*hidden person of the heart*” (1 Peter 3:4).

To keep your life from losing its luster in middle age, try to maintain a positive attitude based on the following proclamations:

1. I will stay young at heart. I will keep growing and going.
2. On my journey beyond youth, I will stay young at heart by living the moment, laughing, and embracing a positive attitude.
3. My personal relationship with Jesus Christ will empower me to experience the beauty of being an ageless person.
4. Knowing God through a daily time of quiet intimacy propels my life into universal and eternal living. It gives me wings to fly through my maturing life and reason to live well.
5. I will choose to live fully after 50, dreaming new dreams and investing my energies to the lives of others.
6. Investing in relationships for eternity gives life depth, breadth, and a reason for living well.
7. Excellent nutrition energizes me to live agelessly.
8. With proper exercise, I can rekindle my fire for life.
9. I will open the jaws of menopause with help from my doctor, great habits, and a great attitude.
10. To be 50ish, female, and fabulous, I will make the most of my best.
11. I will dance with anticipation every day of my life as I move toward eternity and my final home.

Fabulous After 50 is your personal invitation to a lifelong, and long-life, celebration. Congratulations! You are a woman of strength! You have survived disease and accidents. Taking God's free gift of time and adding increased strength, faith, and new dreams will give renewed life to our remaining years.

How old would you be if you didn't know how many years you had already lived? Your answer will help determine the quality of life to the end of your days. Youth has far more to do with

mind and spirit than years lived. As Max Lucado said, “Your goal is not to live long; it’s to live.”

I suggest that we set our minds at “young” and keep going. The ancient King Solomon reminds us that what you think is what you are. (See Proverbs 23:7.) Far too many women over 50 feel old, useless, and depleted. A small percent grab life and go with it. I want us as women to feel precious, empowered, and encouraged as we embrace our middle years.

Let’s walk arm in arm into the future filled with hope. Every day of midlife will offer abundant adventure and excitement if we maintain the right perspective.

• QUESTIONS FOR IMMEDIATE APPLICATION •

1. List five things you choose to do in your own personal life that will make your midlife prime time.
2. Write down (a) a higher goal, (b) a new activity, and (c) a deeper relationship that will renew your “second adulthood.”
3. What do you think is the secret of being fabulous after 50?

• TEN WAYS TO CHEAT AGING •

1. *Believe*—in God; faith keeps you sipping from the Fountain of Youth. Women who have faith and attend worship service regularly live longer and better.
2. *Exercise*—Use it or lose it! Exercise your body, soul, spirit, and mind.
3. *Attitude*—We are what we think. Some of us are growing younger, but most of us are growing older. If we work with energy and zeal, expecting life to be rich, full, and adventurous, that expectation will be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4. *Maintain Proper Diet*—A daily balanced diet from the “Food Guide Pyramid” (you can find it on your bread wrapper!). Take one multivitamin/multi-mineral dietary supplement daily.
5. *Laugh*—Women who laugh, last! Laughter is a stress buster that lifts both our spirits and our faces. It juices the chemical endorphins in the brain, which make us feel euphoric.
6. *Keep Moving*—Get up and go! If you dread growing older because you fear physical deterioration and memory loss, your fears will likely be realized. However, if you use this time to keep moving and growing, you prescribe for yourself years of excitement and adventure.
7. *Look Good*—When you look your best, you feel your best, and you receive more positive response from the people with whom you interact.
8. *Live in the Now*—Live your best now. Each new day is a new chance at life. Yesterday is a cancelled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Today is a check. Have fun spending it.
9. *Rekindle*—Make your aging life burn with energy. It takes only a spark to get a fire going.
10. *Give*—You can’t outgive God or people.

• THE ABC’S OF AGING GRACEFULLY •

A—Attitude

B—Beauty goes beyond looks

C—Church

D—Diet

E—Exercise

F—Fiber! Fearless! Forgiveness!

G—Gravity isn't for the heart

H—Help others

I—Ideas and ideals

J—Joy

K—Kindness

L—Learn constantly; listen; look

M—Motivation; mind over matter

N—Notice

O—Out with osteoporosis

P—Prevention

Q—Quit bad habits

R—Read

S—Stress reduction; soul care

T—Treasure others

U—Understanding

V—Volunteer; values

W—Walk; work; wonder; wisdom

X—(These are always contrived) How about x-peri-
ence? x-citement?

Y—Youthful heart

Z—Zeal, zero gravity

• ● •

AGING SUCCESSFULLY: ATTITUDE #1

I will set my mind at “young” and keep going and growing.

• ● •