

A Lifetime Together

My husband and I have celebrated a lot of anniversaries. I wouldn't exactly call the two of us old ... I prefer the word "mature." Mature fits. All these married years *have* brought a degree of maturity. When we speak we do so from considerable experience.

I'd like to share with you some important things we've learned over the years, both about our intimate relationship and about the faithful commitment that supports its beauty. Please, take these words deep into your heart.

Be thankful for one another

Thankfulness goes a long way towards increasing intimacy and passion and pleasure. There is, however, a catch: in order to be thankful, we need to get rid of our demand for perfection. We might as well, because perfection will never happen. Instead of perfectionism, substitute contentment. Learn to see beauty in corners where you may have missed its presence because you were looking for something else.

Forgive quickly

Generally we have trouble forgiving people because we think we're better than they are. Romans 3:23 totally undermines that position. It tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All. Compared to God, the rest of us are on a very level playing field. "All" helps me remember that nobody is better than me and that I'm not better than anybody else. Neither are you. Knowing that helps us forgive.

It helps also to know that when we forgive we are imitating Jesus (who has forgiven both us and the spouse we currently find offensive).

Nurture faithfulness

Marriage is not just a promise to each other, but a promise to God. When we marry we promise commitment. We need to take our commitment seriously. There are times in any marriage when we won't like our spouse very much. If at those times we remember our promise to God, it will help us keep our promise to our spouse.

I find myself becoming less judgmental when I remember how difficult it must be for Jesus to live inside me. The part of me that resists Him surely pains Him more than it pains me. Yet He stays. He never lets up on His commitment to my welfare. He never gives up on me ... or on you. Jesus demonstrates faithful love, the kind of love that nourishes both heavenly and earthly relationships. Husbands and wives need to practice such faithfulness with each other.

Anticipate newness

Don't believe people who say that things get bland as the years go by. If we expect blandness, we will end up bored. The last sex expert I listened to told the group that initial passion always fades. It didn't surprise me when I heard this expert is now divorced. (I wonder if she got bored.)

My husband and I have found that intimacy, passion, and pleasure don't fade; they deepen and intensify. Our many years together have taught us valuable lessons. We've gotten better at spontaneity, better at noticing when nuances appear, better at laughing at our foibles, more generous, more creative, and more comfortable with surprise. We continue to anticipate newness.

Cultivate patience

It takes a long time to learn to love each other well. Deep intimacy matures slowly, and the soil in which it grows has a surprising mix of elements: laughter and tears, pleasure and pain, hopes realized and hopes torn away. Most people think easy circumstances will better foster love ... that's not necessarily the case.

In the last three years my husband has had seven eye surgeries and lost a great portion of his sight. We've had to make radical changes in how we live and what we can do. It's been hard – we didn't expect so many difficult details. We also didn't expect that we each would turn into much nicer people. I've watched my husband develop a sweetness and generosity that go to depths I'd never seen. I've learned (and it has not come naturally) to become less demanding and self-centered. I'm actually becoming kind. We treasure each other with a new depth; we connect more richly spiritually; we have both become better lovers. My goodness, it has taken us a long time!

What words best sum up our lifetime together? I'd choose Sarah's words in Genesis 17: *When I am old shall I have pleasure?* Yes, she did. And so have we. In many spheres.

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