



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 167 – Aging Gratefully with Heather Creekmore

Elisa Morgan, Eryn Adkins & Vivian Mabuni with Heather Creekmore

[Music]

Heather: Aging just snaps us... it's like a stress or trauma response. We're kind of snapped right back to it. And so, I do think we have to reframe it, right? We have to go back to, am I defining beauty the way the world does or the way the Word does.

[Music]

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Elisa: So, Eryn, we've talked kind of repeatedly, you and I, about the fact that there's a bit of an age gap between us, which we love... because...

Eryn: Yes.

Elisa: ... we bring different perspectives to each other. And then with Viv as well, she's kind of in between us and that's amazing. You know, we... we've got a good twenty, thirty years in between you and me. Well, how does the whole topic of aging hit you? Do you ever feel like, oh my goodness, I'm getting old? Or is that just something I feel?

Eryn: Well, so I will be thirty-seven by the time this podcast comes out, celebrating my birthday and it's a conversation that I've had with a few of my friends because a lot of women my age are starting to do things to prevent aging. Doing different procedures and I have this, like, peer pressure met with age gracefully check in my spirit, you know, and I'm like I don't know what is putting vanity as an idol.

Elisa: And I just want to say too, that the older I get, gosh, the less big of a deal it is to me and the more it is my context. I forget about it until I look in the mirror and see some lumpy-bumpy thing, spotty-watty something. But you know, besides that, I feel so much freer, having passed a certain threshold, to just be



myself. In this conversation, we're going to be talking with Heather Creekmore, and Heather, you have just written a devotional on aging gratefully, which is really cute little phrase. I love that... and Heather, I... I want to start off by welcoming you. We're so glad that you're here.

Heather: It's so great to be with you, thanks for having me.

Elisa: And I guess I'm... I'm looking at you as we record and I'm thinking, you don't look so old to me, so [laughter]... How did you get interested in this topic of aging? Cause I'm not sure you're that old.

Heather: Well, to give myself some credibility, perhaps, I will turn 50 this summer... so...

Elisa: Yeah, like I said, that's not that old. [laughter] I know, I hear you. You're thick...

Heather: It's all relative, right?

Elisa: ... on that hinge point of life. You're thick on it...

Heather: Right.

Elisa: ... I... I hear you...

Eryn: At the end of this, we're going to put your skin routine in the show notes... [laughter]

Heather: That's hilarious. Again, like, this is a topic that we don't talk about a lot. And so, I started working in the field of body image about a decade ago, another topic that women don't like to talk about. And it's certainly a topic that I never thought I would be talking about because this was a big struggle for me. I was raised in the church, I was raised in Christian schools, you know, I knew that God looked at my heart and not my jean size... like, all the things, fearfully wonderfully made: check. And yet, I never felt like my body was good enough. I had really bought into the world's way to define beauty and was trying to keep up with what culture told me would make me loved more, right?

Elisa: Yes.

Heather: If I looked like this, then you will have everything you ever desired. And so, aging, you know... forty wasn't really a big deal for me, but forty-five...that's when things started to change.



Elisa: Was it a physical wake up?

Heather: Physical...

Elisa: Okay.

Heather: ... for sure. You know, I... I think... there might've even been a little pride involved with like forty being like, *hey, what's everyone complaining about? Like, you know, I still feel good. I still look good.* And then forty-five, everything crashed. I was like, *oh, there it is. That pride comes before the fall thing...*

Elisa: Yeah, I know.

Heather: ... so, you know, my heart in this book was to really help women at this midlife point...

Elisa: Okay.

Heather: ...where... things are changing, and it's like a second puberty, I've heard it called, right? It's like, all of a sudden, *what is going on with my body...*

Eryn: That's a good way to say it.

Heather: ... *and my emotions* and all the things? It's something that I'm living, and I wanted to just encourage and... and shepherd women alongside me on this journey through midlife.

Elisa: You know, that's a real deal, what you just described as a second puberty...

Eryn: Yeah,

Elisa: ... that's a fascinating way to approach this topic, too, you know, every single human on the planet, and, you know, unless you have some kind of a... a difference, goes through puberty. And then as women, we go through menopause. But how to go through menopause is less talked about. And just as with puberty, it's very individualized. Every body handles it differently. Some, you know, can be just normal and no big deal. Some are almost like the whole postpartum crisis, you know...

Eryn: Yeah.



Elisa: ... it's a... it's a post-life crisis in... in terms of menopause. Talk to us a little bit about what you've learned about how menopause affects women.

Heather: Well, you know, to kind of loop back to the puberty concept, right? At puberty, we believe that it's normal, right? Maybe our daughter's going through it, or when we went through it, we didn't feel normal, right?

Elisa: Totally, totally.

Eryn: Right.

Heather: ... But... but mom was hopefully able to be there saying, *this is what happens to everyone. This is...*

Elisa: Yeah.

Heather: ... *part of becoming a woman.* But on the other side of it, when we hit perimenopause I think we're given different messages.

Elisa: Okay.

Heather: We're told *you should fight it, you don't have to experience this, oh, that... that stomach that you suddenly have now, you're just not eating right or exercising right or taking the right supplement. There's something you can do to make sure your body doesn't change.* And if you think about it, just from a scientific perspective, right, like, that doesn't even make sense, right?

Eryn: Right.

Heather: ... Of course, our bodies are constantly changing. They're adapting. As hormones fluctuate and change, things are gonna change. And so, the shame and maybe even guilt that...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... we feel entering our forties, fifties, sixties, with everything changing and these messages coming at us saying, oh, *you're just not doing well enough. You...*



Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... *are failing*. You should have been able to keep your body the same. It's just not reasonable or realistic. So, I... I think there's confusion around this season of life because I think deep down we want to believe that we're in control...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... and... and that the way our bodies look is completely up to us.

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... And maybe we had some degree of control in our twenties and thirties, but I think as we hit perimenopause, oh boy, all bets are off, right?

Elisa: Talk for a second about menopause, cause there, I think there are probably a lot of women listening who are nearing that boundary. It's really important to see, you know, with puberty we mark it as, well, when you start your period, boom, you're in puberty. But you've been... becoming in puberty for a long time, and you will be going through puberty as your hormones rage and settle for years. Well, menopause is different. You know, some people might have a hysterectomy, or some people might have their tubes tied, or some people might be on medication that stops their periods. But for menopause, it's often kind of silent and it'll show up in our emotions more than our flow, if you will. Talk to us about how do we know we're even in menopause, and what do we quote do about it?

Heather: Right? Yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting... like, short of the hysterectomy or other interventions, most of us are in perimenopause for four to seven years, at least some... for some it's ten years. And I didn't know this until I wrote the book, but menopause is actually just one moment in time. So, perimenopause is... is really the...

Elisa: Okay.

Heather: ... phrase that we use. Menopause is one moment in time, and that's that exact moment when you went without a period for a year. And I've talked to many women who went without for eleven months and then got it again and they were like, *oh no, like set right back*. The clock has to start again. So, menopause is that moment in time, and then postmenopause is anything after that moment in time. So,



really what we're talking about is perimenopause and that long season of what is this, what... what is going...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... on with my body? And of course, you know, the...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... symptoms are vastly different, you know, for all of us. For some women it's, they start missing periods. For others, it's... for me, it was I got a period every twenty days. Isn't this fun. So...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... it does vary and, you know, and there's lots of options out there when you talk to your doctor about how to cope with it if you want to do any kind of intervention. But I think one of the things that I recommend in the book, and this was... recommended by doctors and others who are leading women through handling menopause well, is... is the need for us to actually pause during perimenopause. Prayer, meditation, rest, finding moments of peace, time to breathe can really make a difference in how we cope. Now, I think the cruel joke, and maybe it's because I started late in the family side of things. I think the cruel joke is this is hitting me when I've got to take care of aging parents, and I've got teenagers...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: Right.

Elisa: That's tough, yeah.

Heather: ... that are getting ready to go to college. So, it's like, how am I supposed to pause now, Lord? Like, this is not... this... this could have been timed better... But...

Eryn: Right.

Heather: ... but trying to find... find ways to really breathe and rest in Him in this season, and I think it's really important for us emotionally, spiritually, but also physically.



Eryn: You know, Heather, I'm such a firm believer in the things that we tell ourselves, we will live out those words over time. And some of the things that we tell ourselves can be very obvious and harmful to our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. And then other words I think are a little subtle. In your journey, in writing and discovering and having conversations with women, what would you say is a subtle lie that you noticed that women tell themselves about their body, their appearance, something that's subtle and not so obvious...

Heather: Yeah.

Eryn: ... that we can look out for.

Heather: Eryn, there's so many, but I think... there's some nuance to the way I'm going to answer this question, because they might not be subtle, but I think they've been with us for so long that we don't hear them. Right? So, the lies that I talk about most with women are lies like *you're too fat* or, you know, *you're too lazy because you can't get this body size* or, you know, like they're related to body size and shape and trying to change certain parts. But the women I work with, and I work with women into their seventies, have been hearing these same lies since they were ten, eleven, twelve years old. And so, the subtlety is that they don't hear them anymore. They've accepted it as fact, as truth, as something that they couldn't possibly argue with...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... because it is their truth to, you know, use our culture slang, right? It's become their truth and their truth really trumps God's truth. And... and maybe even, you know, their loved ones around them that are saying, *we don't see you that way*...

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... it trumps that truth, too.

Eryn: That is so real. You know, and I've heard somebody say a lie told over time becomes a form of truth.

Elisa: That's good, Eryn. And I can't help but think how these lies get stitched together into a reality. And it's interesting to me that we're talking about aging gratefully, and yet we've slipped straight into, and it's because the context here is fine, but into our bodies is where we're focused on our aging. You know,



we're looking at menopause and perimenopause. We're looking at the... the stomach that won't go back to where it used to go back. You know, we're... we're looking at procedures that we might do. And then we go to: why? Well, we've believed these lies. So, it's so interesting that all of our body concept that we're talking about right here, you know, in this conversation goes back to our mind concept. Can you connect how we can reapproach aging physically, our bodies and... and maybe our faces too, we talked about skincare... maybe our faces, too. But how do we connect almost an internal rewiring, a reinvention of who we are internally to cope with the physical and what's changing there?

Heather: I think the pattern goes that through our twenties and thirties, we're in the battle, right? We're fighting to maybe get the look, get the body, maybe after babies bounce back, you know, all these things that culture tells us, right? And then we hit the forties and fifties, and... and you mentioned earlier, Elisa, it's like reality slaps us in the face with, *wow, I'm actually aging...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Heather: ... *There's nothing I can do about that.* And so, what my body looks like is telling the story of how I'm aging, perhaps. But what's going on in my heart? What am I believing in my mind? And a lot of times we do kind of snap right back to *my value and worth come from the way I look.* Right? And even if we did good work in our thirties or forties to combat that lie, boy, aging just snaps us... It's like a stress or trauma response. We're kind of snapped right back to it. And so, I do think we have to reframe it, right? We have to go back to, am I defining beauty the way the world does or the way the Word does. Right? That's the heart of it. Whose definition am I going to believe? And then as we approach aging, if we believe what God says about aging, aging's a good thing. Aging's a beautiful thing. While culture might tell us we're aging out of relevance, really, we're just coming into our own where we finally have the life experience, hopefully maybe the years of walking with the Lord and seeing His faithfulness and His goodness, that we can share that to those who are younger than us, encourage them. And we actually have more to offer now than... than maybe ever before.

Elisa: I meet so many women who, you know, they've completed or are completing the child rearing years, they may or may not be married, and may or may not have a great relationship if they are, but there's this reassessment of *what do I have to offer?* And the pursuit of purpose is so intense. What do you have to say to those women who are looking for a place to have meaning? Again, their kids are gone, and then we see people just yearning for grandkids and, you know, *I'll take them every day of the week so you can...* and, you know, and then we'll throw ourselves in that, which is beautiful. And a lot of people do that with great success and fulfillment, but that's not it. Not everybody gets to do that. So, what do we do about that whole desire for purpose?



Heather: I think, you know, just like our bodies have changed over the decades, sometimes our skill sets, the gifts that we've operated in, that we've gotten stronger in some gifts. Maybe there's gifts that God's given us that we just haven't had the opportunity to use yet, and are just muscles waiting to be worked out. So, I think there should be an excitement there. I mean, of course it's scary. A new season can come with a little fear. And then also there's the process of kind of grieving the old season too. I don't think we want to overlook that, right? Like kind of taking the moments or... or... or... or season to pause and say, *okay, what is next for me?* But I think there's so much possibility as we partner with God and say, *what's next, what can I do? What dreams have You given me that maybe were on hold during a season of child rearing and can now come to fruition? What have You gifted me for?* We've got, you know, the whole, whole rest of whatever years God gives us ahead of us to do that in, and for a lot of us, that's a lot of time we've got.

Eryn: I love how I can tell that you have fought to learn how to reframe your head space, and it's so inspiring. What Scriptures, I know you said, you know, going to the Word and really learning what the Word says, not the world says, what are some Scriptures that you've read? Or maybe it's something that the Holy Spirit just downloaded into your mind that we could maybe glean from and hold to for ourselves.

Heather: Well, so my life verse is a life verse you've probably never heard anyone else have. So...

Elisa: Okay.

Heather: ... Jonah 2:8, "Those who pay attention to vain idols forsake all hope of steadfast love." And it's part of Jonah's prayer when he's in the belly of the big fish. And that changed everything for me. Like I said, I was raised in a Christian home. I knew the Word, but I had made my appearance an idol and it wasn't something that God showed me until I was in my late thirties and I felt like it was a big grace at the time to have that sin pointed out to me. And I feel like it's an idol that I battle all the time. I feel like I now have the tools, so it... the battle's, you know, fleeting. It's, *oh, I have that thought. Okay. I know what that thought is. Okay. Move on with your day.* But really reframing this as not a battle with my body, or with aging, or with trying to keep up with looking like her, or her, her, and really a battle with this idol. Which, really, my idol was composed of my ideals. So... a lot of us live our whole lives with this ideal us, right? Like, the... the ideal Heather is always on time, always dressed fashionably, she has great hair, you know, like, the list. I mean, I could probably fill a book with the list of things that the ideal Heather is supposed to be. But the ideal Heather is an idol. And maybe there's been a couple of times in my life when I've been able to, like, check off one or two of those ideal Heather things, but never all at once. Right? I can never... I can never get it all together at the same time. And so, as long as that ideal was lingering out there, it was beckoning me to worship it and to really try to be more like it, that ideal Heather,



than to be more like Jesus and to be more like what Scripture tells me a godly, beautiful woman is like. And so, that has been course correcting, mentally reframing all the things for me. And then also thinking about Romans 12:1–2, you know, transforming our minds. Most of us have heard that Scripture before, but I heard it taught... a couple of years ago that really, to reframe, to... to change our thoughts. It's not just about taking the thoughts captive. Of course that's important, but it's really about seeing ourselves as being in God's kingdom instead of this earthly kingdom. And so, it... it's almost like thinking in a foreign language. Right? So, I can think in English, right? But thinking in a foreign language requires more effort and...

Eryn: Yeah, that's a great point.

Heather: ... really, I've got to work harder at it. And so... so changing our thoughts in that way.

Elisa: To bounce off of that, you know, I have lots of friends in their late forties, early fifties, and for most of them, life hasn't been perfect. You know, for most of them, there's been stuff that they never expected. It may be a... a teen who veered away, it may be a sudden divorce, it may be the small drain of who they thought God was into what they're discovering He is, which is stunning, but sometimes silent. And most of the people that I know have this intersection of a disillusionment of, you're calling it the ideal, as it intersects with reality. And we can have that with our bodies, we can have that with our goals, we can have that with, you know, what we see as our achievements. But I think we have that in our faith as well.

Heather: Yeah. I mean, I think for me personally, I was raised with a little bit of a Disney perspective [laughter]...

Elisa: That would work. That would work.

Heather: ... on faith, right?

Eryn: Yes, yup.

Heather: ... You know, like I was going to... I... I saved myself for marriage, I was going to marry the prince, we were going to live happily ever after...

Eryn: Yes.



Heather: ... and as long as I have the God in Jesus boxes checked and, you know, showed up for... for church each week, like, things are going to be great. And it did feel like it was a bit of a promise...

Vivian: Right.

Heather: ... you know, I... I don't... I don't know that it was actually promised to me, but it felt like it was promised to me. And so, when those struggles came, I didn't get married until I was 31, which isn't that old now, but at the time that felt like, *oh, you're missing... missing the mark*. So, when the struggles came, when God didn't come through, when I thought He should come through, or when things are a whole lot harder, I mean, marriage was a whole lot harder than anyone ever told me it was going to be.

Elisa: Yes. Yes.

Heather: The... the... the Disney promise did not... did not last. And... so, I think that, though, is when we have the sweet opportunity to really get to know the real God instead of the God who is a figment of our imagination, the magic genie in the bottle who, if I did this for Him, then He would do this for me. And when we really have to lean on trusting Him, right?

Elisa: Yeah.

Heather: Cause it's not really trust if things are going, well, the way you expected, the way you planned... right...

Elisa: True.

Heather: ... then you can be like, *oh yeah, I trust God*. And then when things take a sharp left turn, it's like...

Elisa: That's right.

Heather: ... that's when the rubber meets the road with trust.

Elisa: Yeah. That's good. Thanks for being vulnerable there.

Eryn: Heather, what are some practical things that we can do in learning how to accept this new season?



Heather: Yeah. Well, you know, and I think it... it kind of all goes together, right? Because I think as we get on a new mission and maybe, so something super practical there is maybe you just need to take the spiritual gifts test again or shape test, you know, because you've got a whole, like, maybe season or decades even of life experiences and maybe even, you know, work experiences, things you've done that maybe you've not refreshed... a look at how has God gifted me? What was I built for? What was I made for? And I think...

Vivian: Yeah.

Heather: ... as we're able to look at that component of our lives, then it becomes a little easier to let the season change with our bodies. So, for example, most of us, I dare say ninety-nine percent of us, we're not able to wear the same clothes at age ten as we were at age fifteen. And so, this concept that we should have shame at age forty or fifty or sixty...

Elisa: Yeah.

Heather: ... that we can't wear those jeans from college is just ridiculous...

Elisa: Yeah, that's good.

Heather: ... right? It... It's a new season. And so many of us hold on to those things...

Elisa: Yeah.

Heather: ... right? And... and some of that holding on is a remembrance. It's a, like, *oh, but I loved that time*. You know, *this is the dress that I wore on that special date in our twenties*, you know, but it's like, that doesn't fit anymore. It's taking up space in your closet, it's distracting you every time you walk in your closet because you're thinking, *I don't wear that size anymore*. Like...

Eryn: Right.

Heather: ... what would it look like to get the shame out of the closet and make the space, both physically right and then also emotionally, for the new thing that God has in store for you for the next season.

Elisa: And you've titled this topic for you, *Aging Gratefully*, you know, what does gratitude have to do with aging and... and how did you settle on that?



Heather: Yeah. Well, another book I had written a few years ago, I was exploring the concept of contentment and joy, and there's a study, and I'm not going to get it perfectly, but essentially they looked at accident victims who were paralyzed who wrote in a gratitude journal every day, and they compared them with lottery winners, and they followed him for a certain amount of time and then saw who was happier at the end of this period of time, and the paralyzed accident victims, those who were once abled bodied and we're now in wheelchairs, because they practiced gratitude every day were happier than those who had won the lottery.

[Music]

Elisa: So good.

Heather: And so, I thought as we think about aging, right, instead of, like, keeping our list of woes, woe is me with the, you know, the new wrinkles, the new lumps, you know, the new brain fog, hello menopause, like, that's not a fun thing, you know, all the list of things, what would it look like to be grateful along the way, to look for the joy, the blessings, the gifts that are part of aging and how would that change the way we walk through it.

[Music]

Eryn: I think it'd be great if we all wrote a gratitude list, even for our aging bodies.

Elisa: I love that idea, Eryn. Well, before we go, be sure to check out Heather's book, *Aging Gratefully*. You can find that and more at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Eryn: And if you liked this episode, or if you've been listening to the show for a bit, please leave us a rating and review wherever you listen to your podcast. We would love to hear from you.

Elisa: Thanks for joining us. And don't forget, God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His

[Music]

Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Ann Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Josh and Gabby for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.



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