

What's happening to my body?

It's like a whole different person is looking back at me from the mirror these days. I was never sporty but fairly fit – at least my body parts were vaguely where they were supposed to be – but now it is a very different story. My hair is like straw. Not just grey but a stringy grey that makes it nearly impossible to tame. The lines on my face are getting deeper as my skin gets progressively drier with every passing month. My muscles are tired, perpetually weak. And my joints, at times, are so painful that I waddle like a duck and drop things on a regular basis. Don't even get me started on my waistline – as someone who has long been a size 10, I've shot up to a size 14 around the middle – and none of the old dieting techniques seem to have any effect.

There are books and nutritional products in abundance on the market. In exchange for an exorbitant amount of money, they promise a pain-free path back to health and a toned figure. I've never found anyone in my circles who thinks they're helpful, though. Maybe a little useful, but not the panacea they claim to be. And so, I feel stuck. Stuck with the reality of a body that is aging. Aging a little too fast for someone in their 50s.

What's happening to my heart?

In the process, I'm discovering new things about my heart. I've never considered myself to be a particularly image-conscious person. I've never spent ages on hair and makeup or buying nice clothes. I thought I was largely free from hangups about my body. It appears I was wrong. I was content with my body whilst it was ballpark in line with cultural norms, now it's flabby and failing I've discovered I'm profoundly discontent. I dislike the image staring back at me in the mirror. I long for a body that functions better – a body on which clothes fit well.

I've also discovered I'm more jealous than I knew. Those rare women in their 50s who seem to get through the menopause with their stomachs flat are people I envy. I am comparing myself with them more than I had anticipated I would. And I am seeing great swathes of discontent in me.

Along the way, I've been humbled by my limits. A decade ago, I could push my body so much harder than I can these days. Now I can't stay up late and get up early, I need my rest. Now, I can't just rush from one thing to the next, my body needs a break. Now, I have

to say “no” to things because I know one more thing in the diary will be one thing too many. It really smarts. I would like to be Superwoman. I would like to be omnicompetent. I want to be the one who copes, not the one who is in need.

What’s happening to my relationships?

That all means I’m relating differently to my family and friends. At times I think I’m failing them because I struggle to be in touch, present, and active with them in all they want to do. They are compassionate enough. They know I’m “getting old” but I don’t feel old on the inside. I half love it when they care and half rail against the shift in roles. I’m not ready for people to start making accommodations for my limits, not yet.

And there are those moments when people get irritated. I can’t always keep up on a walk, I can’t always look as smart for that big occasion. I know sometimes others are disappointed in me and that hurts. Sometimes I snap back. “You try walking with this level of pain”. But mostly, I turn in on myself. Their disappointment with me pales into insignificance when compared to my disappointment with myself.

What’s happening to my faith?

I can’t see God very clearly in all this. I don’t like feeling the effects of this fallen world. I wish God’s Kingdom would fully come now and I could look and feel well again. When I read of his love, it doesn’t quite sink in. I certainly don’t feel “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139). And yet, there is hope.

As I see afresh the humility with which Jesus entered the world, I can begin to learn that my value is not in my competence or effectiveness in the local church. I can begin to taste true love – love that is lavished on me not because of what I can offer in return but simply because I am loved. I can begin to see my identity more in who Jesus has made me to be than in what I can give to the world around.

I can wrestle with the fact my body is still a precious gift, it’s just one that looks different these days. It’s a gift that sags but then so does my favourite jumper – it’s not smart but it’s so comfy and precious. My body is “lived in” and “loved” rather than straight off the shelf and that is OK. Each wrinkle and roll are a sign that the Lord’s goodness to me has now spanned many years.

Recently, I’ve plucked up the courage to see my GP. I didn’t want to waste her time chatting about the natural aging process when she must be so busy with people who are “properly ill”. We now have a plan of a few things to try – some supplements, some medication, a trip to the physio here and there. I’m still looking forward to the new heavens

and earth – a resurrection body sounds great to me! But in the meantime, I'm slowly learning it's OK to be a menopausal woman. Not fun but in Christ, I am growing and free.