

Last week my doctor called to see how I was doing after a procedure he had performed on me. Somewhat kidding, I told him I was beginning to feel old and that the high maintenance of being that way was getting annoying.

His response?

“Jim, you’re not old, you’re just durable!”

We both laughed. I hung up and said to my wife, “Guess what John just said to me?” I told her and she laughed! But then the conversation got a bit more serious as we began talking about how many “durable” people we know, and what a joy it is to be around them.

Durability, by definition, is not just about surviving or lasting, but about lasting with a sense of purpose intact. A freezer that doesn’t keep food frozen may still keep running, but to what purpose? A clock may keep ticking, but if it doesn’t keep accurate time, it has no real value. Many things and many people ‘last’ like an old freezer or clock, but that is different than durability.

My doctor and friend, John, was onto something. Being old, as too much of our culture understands that word, suggests having outlived our purpose. It suggests being defined by the inevitable limitations that age brings. It makes assumptions – very often erroneously – that advanced years inevitably means inability to be a real part of the larger world and community. But being durable suggests something very different. Durable people know they have limitations, know they cannot do everything they used to do, but still do what they can to be a part of the larger community. Durable people reach out to others, offering concern, a helping hand, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on. Durable people know joy and are a joy to know.

So the next time you are tempted to use age or limitations as excuses for not caring about others, for not reaching out to others, think about this choice. Do I want to be old (as our culture defines it) or do I want to be durable?

And if you are ministering to older adults encourage them to be durable!

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