

# ARE YOU MATURE ENOUGH?

Jean E. Laird

The contents of this pamphlet are concerned with the natural virtues necessary for successful living. The science of psychology can teach us many things. Religion motivates us to supernaturalize these natural aids by doing them out of love for God, self, and neighbour. All of Christianity is wrapped up in these words: "Love God above all things, and love your neighbour as you love yourself."

## Introduction

Recent statistics show some 395,000 out of 1,527,000 marriages blow up each year . . . or one out of every four! Shocking statistics, aren't they? And the situation isn't getting any better — but worse, psychologists say.

What has gone wrong? During courtship the young couple is vitally interested in each other's hobbies, sports, reading matter, etc. Those athletically inclined play tennis together, swim together, bowl together, and golf together. After a few years of marriage the man is drawn toward his work, and the woman toward her home and children. This is when the "maturity quotient" either takes its toll or becomes an important stabilizing factor.

Maturity is a steady progression, and sometimes it takes a rather strong lever to pry one loose from childish ways of thought and behaviour. A sense of maturity is not only a prime requisite for successful marriage; it is also necessary for general well-being and happiness.

It is a popular belief that people do not change much in personality. So often we meet an old friend and think, "Good old Mary is the same as she was 20 years ago." But, a recent study conducted by Dr. Lowell Kelly, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, shows that important personality changes do occur as the years go on. These changes may be slow, hardly noticeable, and undramatic, but nevertheless they are there.

People who constantly try to develop more mature characteristics find their personality changes to be a very positive thing. All too often, however, the opposite is true. And this for various reasons. As infants we are completely selfish. To ourselves, we are more important than anything or anybody else in the world. During the process of development, we should arrive at a certain balance called maturity. But many of us never attain that perfect balance.

A prominent psychologist in the state of New York tells this experience about his visit with his wife's mother. After having met the woman only briefly, the young doctor and his wife spent the weekend with her parents ... and it was a long weekend. The psychologist found his mother-in-law to be a very domineering woman who dispensed advice starting with what one should eat for breakfast and continuing to how wide the windows should be opened at bedtime. The advice-giving had become more than a habit with her. It was a compulsion. If everyone didn't do as she suggested, she pouted.

Before leaving he asked in all politeness: "How in the world did you people manage to spoil your mother so completely?" Maturity, it seems, is not an age, but a "stage"; and this poor woman made herself as well as everyone in the household miserable, because she never "outgrew" this childish tendency. If confronted with it, she would no doubt reply: "Well, that's the way I am, and that's all there is to it."

People who have never developed mature attitudes aren't necessarily against self-improvement. However, we are told they are against "change," which prevents them from progressing toward something better.

The older we get, the more we realize that life is just a continuous chain of situations. Age is not necessary for maturity, but the more years we live the greater is our opportunity to develop maturity.

To be a first-rate housewife and mother, emotional and mental maturity is a "must." This role requires unselfishness, courage, the ability to budget time as well as money, and the knack of hanging on to a sense of humour during a catastrophe. Emotional maturity can spell the difference between survival and cracking up.

To be a successful husband and father a man must be able to expect the unexpected. Problems arise at work. Communication can bog down. Personal relationships may bring entanglements. At home, too, emergencies arise to challenge even the strongest. A man's most priceless asset is his maturity.

## Signs of Maturity

What do the experts consider as "signs" of maturity? From the many studies and research projects conducted each year by prominent psychologists all over the country, we have picked out 21 "signs of maturity," and here they are:

- Mature persons know they should Not Give Advice unless they are asked for it; and then it should be given in the form of a suggestion. If your good friend, Jane, has a spot on her carpeting which she has found impossible to remove, tell her that such-and-such cleaner worked for you — being careful to leave the decision up to her.
- Tactfulness is a sign of maturity. What is tact? It is the ability to hammer home a point without hitting the other guy on the thumb . . . the ability to sail through life without saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, habitually blundering and leaving a trail of wounded feelings behind us. It is the gift of telling the truth and still getting along with others, of dealing honestly with people without giving offense. At times it can mean telling the whole truth, a part of it, gently evading it, or not saying anything at all.
- Mature persons Take Their Jobs Seriously, and do their very best at it. How many times have you had checkers or cashiers at the grocery counter look right through you and the expensive food items you are purchasing, while they perform their arithmetic without so much as dropping a stitch in the conversation they are knitting with a fellow cashier in the next aisle? This sort of immature attitude toward one's job surrounds us on all sides.

The mature person will also stick to a project or job he has started, even though he has begun to hate it, just because he believes everything started ought to be finished. If he decides to give up a plan or project, his decision is clear-cut without brooding or becoming resentful over it.

- The mature person has learned to Live With the Imperfections he can do nothing about. If a real personality problem or physical liability exists, he refrains from discussing it. Why? Because this only embarrasses others and puts them in a position where they feel they must be reassuring when they may not know how to handle the situation gracefully. If you can't overcome a handicap, act as if you didn't have it.

As Beethoven became deaf, he worked with more and more industry at his musical compositions, turning out better and better work.

- The mature person has learned to Give the Benefit of the Doubt. He refuses to listen to malicious gossip, and believes the best rather than the worst. He does not judge other people on the basis of rumours. He also avoids criticizing others. (Any loyal person will resent having his friends criticized.) He knows that hiding within every petulant, sharp-tongued critic lies a shivering, uncertain soul struggling to find security and maturity.
- Mature people Lend a Helping Hand tactfully, without seeming to be patronizing. For instance, she can "help" the new bride or novice cook without stealing the scene.
- The mature person is Content to Be Utterly Useless at Times. If she is invited to someone's home for dinner and the hostess declines her offer to help, the mature person sits back and enjoys it. She knows too many people in the kitchen may unnerve the hostess.
- To Accept Gifts Graciously is a sign of maturity, for an ungraciously accepted gift can inflict deep hurt. Mrs. B. L., of Chicago, tells about the time she met the jubilant husband of her best friend on his way home from work with a beautifully wrapped package. "You know, Martha has always wanted a fur coat," he said. "For more than three years I have saved a few dollars here and there from my spending money to get it for her. Come along home with me and see her face light up when she sees it!"

Mrs. B. L. went along with him, and watched Martha open the package. Her first exclamation was, "Oh, Bill, how could you? You know how badly the house needs painting." Then grudgingly, "Of course, it is really lovely. How sweet of you to buy it for me." It was too late. The more than three years of generous thought had been cooled with her first reaction.

Leigh Hunt once wrote: "To receive a present in the right spirit, even when you have none to give in return, is to give one in return."

- The mature person has also learned to Accept Help Graciously. Although they aren't gift wrapped, charitable deeds basically say and mean the same thing as other gifts: "I love you," "I miss you," "I want to see you happy." Why, then, is it so hard for some of us to receive services or favours? Perhaps because many times we have to

ask for them. One expert in the field of psychology answers the question this way: "Most of us like to think we can care for ourselves. When we have to ask for outside help, we feel that in some way we have failed. We 'lose face,' and it is an uncomfortable thing for us to live with."

Another expert says, "Sometimes we don't want to become indebted to the giver, no matter how desperately we need the help." Or, maybe we feel the "helper" will think he has a right to "meddle" in our affairs. Everyone must at one time or other accept help of some sort, either professional or personal, directly or indirectly. Even if we use a friend's name as a reference, this is a plea for help. But, if we can maturely think of this kind of "help" as sharing, we can get rid of the resentment factor which makes us ask ourselves, "Why must I ask him for help? Now I will be indebted to him." The mature person feels grateful that "that person" is going to have a chance to share — to help out.

Much has been said about the "blessedness" of giving, yet without a "receiver" there can be no "giver."

- It isn't hard for the mature person to Admit When He Is Wrong. He recognizes his own disabilities. He doesn't try to fool himself, because he realizes it is much easier to fool himself than to fool others. And, he can own up to his own mistakes and failings.

The small tot is a genius at finding alibis and scapegoats. ("Jimmy made me spill my milk.") And many adults never get far above this level, although their excuses might seem a bit more sophisticated. ("I couldn't finish college because my parents didn't have the money.") The mature person knows that it is he — not his parents, fate, his teachers, or his friends — who is responsible for the way his life turns out.

- The mature person Can Be Candid When Necessary. He has learned the magic of using words such as "I am sorry," "thank you," "I enjoyed doing it for you," spoken with sincerity and warmth. He has also learned how to compliment, and does so as often as possible.

People who are caught in a white lie should readily admit the deception — being careful to do it kindly. Suppose you have told Beth you can't go shopping with her because you must go to visit your mother, when you actually have an appointment with your doctor. Then you run into Beth's husband just outside the physician's office. What should you do? The mature person smiles warmly, and says: "Please tell Beth you caught me in the act. I told my little white lie because it is so boring to talk about one's ailments."

- Mature persons Are Considerate of Others. Experts tell us this kind of maturity is better "caught" than "taught." The considerate child is likely to have parents who were thoughtful of others. Not that they were old-fashioned, standoffish, prissy, or prim, but they observed a code which, in bygone days, was referred to as "the golden rule." They treated their children (and everyone else) as they themselves would like to be treated. And, because of their example, their children learned to be considerate.

Consideration for others prompts us to wait our turn in line at the movie theatre, checkout counter, etc. We have all had the experience of seeing someone barge to the head of the line, whispering some banal excuse to the person he steps in front of. Now, nobody is going to take a person by the scruff of his neck and put him in his place, no matter how inconsiderately he has behaved. He knows this, and this is his protection. Such immaturity is really to be pitied.

- Mature persons Try to Solve Their Own Problems. They know when — and when not — to tell their troubles. They confide their personal woes only to a very trusted friend, a counsellor, a priest, or a minister. When at a party or other festive occasion they have the ability to conceal their problems, so everyone can enjoy a cheerful good time.
- Self-discipline is a sign of maturity. This will often mean postponing personal pleasure for the sake of a greater good. The mature person can turn off an enjoyable TV program because he knows he needs his sleep for the full day of work ahead.
- The mature person has mastered Self-control. The very small infant cries at the first hunger pang. Gradually, however, he learns to put up with waiting and not having his parents indulge his every whim. As he grows older, he realizes there are certain things he would like to do and say, but he must control these desires. He may want to hurt his mother and tell his grandmother to "take a jump in the lake," but he isn't allowed to do this. He

learns that his impulses — whether they stem from anger, excitement, or affection — all have limitations and must be kept under control. He has arrived at maturity.

- The mature person always Returns Borrowed Property Promptly, and with the proper expressions of appreciation. She believes that borrowed household equipment should be returned as soon as possible, and that borrowed books should be read and returned within a week to ten days. And she makes sure the items are restored in the same condition in which they were lent. If they break or become damaged while in her use, she has them repaired or replaced.
- Respect for the Mental Privacy of others is a sign of maturity. Invasion of another's thoughts or a demand for their confidences, as well as eavesdropping and/or poorly-disguised curiosity are all indications of immaturity.
- The mature person doesn't think "budget" is a word to be scorned. He is Wise in the Way He Handles His Money. He doesn't hoard, nor does he spend compulsively. He doesn't feel the need to be surrounded by status symbols. He is not afraid to spend money on things that don't show — such as insurance, a medical plan, etc.

And, the mature person cannot be persuaded to buy a product he doesn't really think right for his needs and pocketbook. He has "sales resistance" and this is ruled solely by his good judgment.

- Mature persons have Learned to Be Tolerant. They can see things from another's viewpoint, granting them the right to their own opinions and peculiarities. They do not harbor grudges, brood over disappointments, nor do they become easily angered.
- The mature person Does Not Expect Everyone to Like Him. He is not afraid to say "no" even though he would be more popular if he said "yes." He is also unafraid to feel very strongly about a lot of things. Many people think exuberance and enthusiasm are signs of immaturity. "Not so," say the psychiatrists. In fact, Dr. Theodore I. Rubin says, "Dedication to winning on any level in any area requires an intensity of emotional investment."

Not a person to sit back, he acts constructively to promote his beliefs. If he doesn't like the way his government is being run, he gets involved in politics and works for the changes he would like to see. If he is concerned about the deprived, the poor, or handicapped children, he volunteers his services to help them.

- Mature people develop a Deep Sense of Responsibility. Most of us have met at least one truly irresponsible person in our lifetimes. She is the girl who can mess up her life without ever really trying at all. She can disrupt a home, undermine an organization, and wreck a working team in quick order. She has never grown up to realize that the entire world wasn't created for her convenience.

We are also familiar with the semi-responsible person. She knows a certain amount of responsibility is required in the mature adult; yet — with only slight evidence — she convinces herself that she is pulling her fair share of the weight.

She is the young wife who agrees with her husband's decision to take a job across the country, and then makes his life miserable with her complaints ("I didn't know I wasn't going to like it"). She is also the young mother who will take great pains to explain to you that she can't control her children because ... there is inadequate supervision at school (the class-rooms are too crowded), all the neighbours let their children run wild, they see so much violence on TV, etc.

We are also no stranger to the over- responsible person. He is the man who is a supervisor, yet insists on doing most of the work of his subordinates. He overburdens himself, while complaining loud and long about having to do everything himself to make sure it is done right.

Or, it may be the girl who stays home with her mother, and complains bitterly about her lot in life. Perhaps she has turned down offers for marriage because she feels "responsible for her mother." She has even refused offers of help from her brothers and sisters —to preserve her image as a "martyr." Her great responsibility to her mother probably stems from an unwillingness to take responsibility for herself. (In many cases, she has even turned a deaf ear to her mother's hints that she get out and find a husband.)

The truly responsible person knows how to limit himself. He doesn't try to run an office, head the Little League, a community group, and a home —all this simultaneously — if he realizes he won't be able to do justice to any of them. He knows that true responsibility consists of knowledge of himself and of others, and the willingness to apply it in every area of life to the best of his ability.

He understands that mature responsibility has its rewards, some of which are tangible. The willingness to do a little more than the job calls for is what turns secretaries into junior executives, and assistants into department heads. And he knows it also carries with it an inner satisfaction in the knowledge that he is doing his very best.

#### Conclusion

Perhaps the most important aspect of maturity is the fact that the mature person likes and respects himself. He works hard at developing his strong points. He finds out what he can do successfully ... and then he does it!

Maturity is that fortunate state of mind that can help you do more, be more, and be happier — whether you are 17 or 70. If you don't quite see yourself as having mastered all of these qualities, the mere fact that you can admit to immaturities shows that you are more mature than you think!

Becoming a mature adult is never- ending hard work. No previous experience is required; the hours are long, but the rewards are fantastic!

\*\*\*\*\*