

Stages of Maturity

(taken from *Bringing the Life Model to Life*⁵)

THE INFANT STAGE

Ideal Age: Birth > Age 4

The infant stage is the first level of maturity. It is built through joy bonds with both parents. Infants need quiet-together time, help regulating distress and emotions, and to see themselves reflected through the “eyes of heaven” by parents. Infancy is a time to receive and give life as important needs are met without asking. Infants need others to synchronize with them first to build “joy strength”.

The task of the infant stage is to receive with *joy*, learn to synchronize and organize self into a person by imitating the example of caregivers. The infant learns to regulate emotions, return to joy from all emotions, and learns to be the same person over time. Learning self-care skills and rest are very important for infants before going to the next maturity level.

THE CHILD STAGE

Ideal Age: Ages 4 > 13

The child stage is a time of learning to take care of one’s self. Children need to learn how to do what they do not feel like doing. They must sort out feelings from imagination and reality. Children will need feedback on guesses, attempts, and failures as they learn. They must be taught their family history, the history of God’s family and the “big picture” of life.

The child stage teaches taking care of oneself (one is enough at this stage.) Children learn to ask for what they need and to express themselves. Developing personal resources and talents is very important for children, as is the ability to make themselves understandable to others. Children should learn what satisfies them, and see themselves through the “eyes of heaven”.

THE ADULT STAGE

Ideal Age: Age 13 > first child

The adult stage starts with a rite of passage, needed to pass from child to adult. Adults bond with peers and form a group identity. The opportunity to observe the same sex using power fairly is needed. Young adults must be given important tasks by their community. Each young adult needs guidance with their personal imprint on history and opportunities to share life in partnership.

An adult will have the task of discovering the main characteristics of his/her heart, proclaiming and defending their personal (and community) group identity, and bringing

⁵ For more details read *The Life Model* by Friesen et. al, Shepherd’s House, *Bringing the Life Model to Life* by Koepcke et. al., Shepherd’s House, or *The Stages of a Man’s Life*, E. James Wilder, Quiet Water Publishing.

self and others back to joy simultaneously. Developing a personal style that reflects his/her heart is a task for adults as is learning to protect others from himself/herself. Learning life-giving sexuality is needed for adult maturity. Mutual satisfaction in relationships characterizes this stage.

THE PARENT STAGE

Ideal Age: From first child until youngest child becomes an adult at age 13

A parent needs to give life, have an encouraging partner, receive guidance from elders, and peer review from other fathers or mothers. A parent helps establish a secure and orderly environment. Giving without needing to receive in return will be a task for the parent, as is building a home. A parent will protect, serve, and enjoy his/her family. The parent's pleasure is helping his/her children reach maturity while synchronizing the developing needs of children, spouse, family, work and church.

THE ELDER STAGE

Ideal Age: Youngest child is an adult

Elders are parents to their communities. They raise communities much like parents raise families. Each elder needs a community to call his/her own. Recognition by his/her community is needed for an elder to find a proper place in the community structure. By the time elder maturity is reached, elders know how to build trust as well as earn it.

Elders practice hospitality, give life to those without families, and they parent and mature their communities. An elder will build and maintain a community identity and act like him/herself in the midst of difficulty and trial. Elders enjoy what God puts in each person they meet, and sees them through the 'eyes of heaven'. Trust is built through the elder's own transparency and spontaneity.

Understanding Maturity

- Maturity stages go through growth, repair and transformation phases.
- Maturity is the human task while redemption is the Divine task.
- Maturing does not give us more value. (Romans 14)
- Maturing is valuable. (Ephesians 4:11-16)
- Failing to mature is perilous. (Hebrews 5:12-14, Proverbs 30:21-23)
- Restoring missing maturity is part of the human work of Christian fellowship.
 - Maturity needs are different for those stuck at infant, child or adult levels.
 - Maturity is not a spiritual gift but comes from our work.
 - Maturity develops in a wise community.
- Defective growth must be corrected at a cost to strong Christians. (Romans 15:1-3)

The Five Maturity Stages with Assessment Questions

1. INFANT STAGE (birth to 3 years old)

Primary task: Learning to receive

- How do I receive feedback or criticism?
- How do I react when I don't get my way?
- How do I handle negative emotions?

Behaviors/Skills: Lives in the natural state of joy, develops trust, and learns to return to joy from every unpleasant emotion.

2. CHILD STAGE (4-12 years old)

Primary task: Taking care of self (while keeping others in mind)

- How do I ask for help when in need?
- How do I handle challenges and difficult tasks?
- How do I own my mistakes?

Behaviors/Skills: Asks for what's needed, develops persistence to do hard things, develops unique talents, and knows self and takes responsibility.

3. ADULT STAGE (13 to birth of first child)

Primary task: Taking care of two people simultaneously

- How do I actively seek win-win solutions?
- How do I bond with my peers and form a group identity?
- How do I help others return to joy?

Behaviors/Skills: Cares for self and others simultaneously in mutually delighting relationships, articulates "who we are" (group identity), and knows how to return self and others to joy

4. PARENT STAGE (1st child to 1st child becoming an adult)

Primary task: Sacrificially taking care of a family or a team

- How do I protect, serve, and enjoy my team?
- How do I create a life-giving culture at work?
- How do I give without expecting something in return?

Behaviors/Skills: Willingly serves sacrificially, demonstrates devoted leadership, and promotes and supports others.

The Five Maturity Stages with Assessment Questions

5. ELDER STAGE (Youngest child has become an adult--having grown children)

Primary task: Sacrificially taking care of a community

- How do I build and maintain a group identity that acts like itself amid difficulty?
- How do I notice and give life to those who struggle?
- How do I help my community and workplace mature?

Behaviors/Skills: Provides meaning, order, direction, and integration, places a high value on and enjoys the true self in everyone, and leads and matures the community.