

Becoming You

("I Wanna Be Free")

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"Boy, just wait 'til I get out of high school," Mike steamed to himself as he laid a strip of rubber all the way from his folks' driveway to the street corner. "I'll get me a job and a place of my own so I won't have to take any more of this hassling." Mike had just had a run-in with his dad and he was doing a slow burn.

"Things are the pits at my house," Connie grumped to her girlfriend as they emerged together from the Home Ec room and turned up the hall toward their lockers. "Shane wants me to quit school and marry him. I think I'll go ahead and do it. Anything to get away from that mess at home."

Sound familiar? Something way down inside of most young people in their later teens longs for independence and freedom. And this is natural. It is the way God intended it to be. Growing up is the process of preparation for independence. But it does not happen all at once. There is no magic in your eighteenth or twenty-first birthday that automatically zaps you into an adult. Real adulthood is the result of the development of two qualities: self-discipline and self-reliance. The process of developing them together in balance is called maturing.

Independence grows along with responsibility. The measure of independence for which you are qualified depends on the measure of responsibility that you demonstrate. To put it another way, the more you are able to control yourself, the less you need to be controlled by others.

Sometimes tensions arise when parents do not allow their maturing children sufficient room to exercise the degree of freedom for which they have become qualified. They do not give opportunity for growing responsibility to function in growing freedom. They want their children to become fully mature first and then be granted their independence and freedom all at once on a particular birthday. They do not realize that independence should be learned and experienced gradually and progressively under controlled conditions. Full independence should come, not as a jarring jolt, the eruption of a smothered volcano, or the sudden shift of an earthquake fault, but as the natural climax of the balanced growth of responsibility and privilege.

Some parents are insecure within themselves. They become psychologically and emotionally dependent on their children and cling possessively to them, not willing to accept the changes that life is bringing to themselves and to their offspring. This puts tremendous pressure on a developing teenager. Some folks never really grow up, but become immature parents of immature offspring. It is sad to watch these undisciplined adults trying to raise undisciplined children. But more often, family tensions arise when

teenagers insist on more freedom and independence than they are prepared for, or at least more than their parent or parents think (correctly or not) that they are prepared for.

Mike was not responding maturely when he jammed his foot to the floor and fish-tailed down the street. He was merely reacting impulsively to his emotions. He is not ready to get out on his own until he demonstrates the ability to control his emotions. Life is full of provocations. Other authority figures will challenge his self-restraint. It is said that three of the most liberating words are: get over it!

"Yeah, but his dad had no right to..."

Maybe so, but remember: maturity involves the ability to respond intelligently in spite of your feelings, no matter what or who "ticked you off."

To react childishly toward maturity in others is inexcusable.

To react childishly toward immaturity in others is understandable, but still childish.

To respond graciously to immaturity in others (especially in adults)—that's real maturity.

That was Connie's hang-up. Oh, she had a real problem—things at home were really "the pits." But Connie's reaction to the problem was immature. Instead of facing the problem and responding to it in a gracious, disciplined and responsible way, she was running. And that is no basis to build a marriage on, with Shane or anyone else. After all, marriage is a lot more than a chance to escape from home.

Instead of exercising self-control, Connie was letting the situation control her—through her own emotions. With an attitude like that, she was in real danger of messing up. She needed to hold steady, face the problem, surmount it and come through it a mature adult.

We are in control of the situation only when we are in control of ourselves. Self-control puts you in control. Remember, the Bible says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). When you stop and think about it, the hassle you are having right now might be your golden opportunity to develop and express the qualities of real maturity—if you will let it be. It depends on how serious you are about really growing up. It is not the situation itself that makes you or breaks you, but how you respond to it.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Now, there is the key to being a real winner: love God. If you have not done so, accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Trust Him to wash away your guilt and to put you together right. Then follow Him as the Lord of every area of your life and living. His word is His will. The Bible is God's maturity manual for you. Get into it and get as much of it into you as you can. Live in it and let it live in you. It will make a true adult out of you.

Christ will not rob you of your individuality. On the contrary, only in Him will you discover who you really are. He wants to help you to become you. Trust Him.