

CHAPTER 5

EMOTIONAL MATURITY

I. LET'S BEGIN OUR STUDY BY DESCRIBING FIRST THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONAL IMMATURITY.

A. SIGNS.

1. Being moody and depressed too much of the time.
2. Crying, pouting, losing temper and screaming over trivial matters.
3. Being late for appointments or allowing pleasures to get in the way of school assignments or other responsibilities.
4. Staying up too late at night when you should be getting your rest — then sleeping in too late for classes or work.
5. Staying in bed and calling in sick when you feel a little tired or down, rather than disciplining yourself and putting your responsibilities first.
6. Getting mad if you aren't the center of attention and the most popular girl around. Or, getting irritated and insolent when you don't get your way.
7. Being demanding of other people and feeling that they should cater to your desires and needs first.
8. Buying on impulse — failing to consider the price, or whether you have the resources.
9. Failing to say "NO" to yourself — giving in to your desires and wants without restraint — disregarding the consequences.
10. Failing to reason out a situation or problem from beginning to end before making a decision — acting first and thinking later.
11. Being easily influenced by others, instead of using your mind and making your own decisions.
12. Daydreaming — wasting your time in a world of fantasy and make believe instead of thinking constructively.
13. Reacting emotionally and falling apart in an emergency. Failing to collect your wits and act with a clearthinking head after the initial blow has passed.
14. Finding fault with everything and everybody, instead of trying to get along with people. In other words, being generally negative and critical toward life.
15. Using the excuse that since you're a woman and therefore more emotional (especially at certain times of the month), you don't have to keep your emotions in tow.
16. Failing to take the blame or being too stubborn to admit it when you are wrong.
17. Feeling inadequate and easily discouraged — particularly when associating with peers who are self-assured, multitalented and successful.
18. Other general manifestations:
 - a. *Shyness — loner-type*
 - b. *Fearful of taking new steps*
 - c. *Impetuous*
 - d. *Self-indulgent*
 - e. *Insensitive and inconsiderate*
 - f. *Whines, complains and cries easily*
 - g. *Overly concerned with your health*
 - h. *Moody, changeable, unstable*
 - i. *Easily offended*
 - j. *Accusing*
 - k. *Competitive — win or else — always have to be first*

- l. Argumentative and intolerant*
- m. Impatient — everything must be "now" — never later*
- n. Sarcastic and cynical*
- o. Unable to be serious and level-headed*
- p. Disorganized*
- q. Unable to concentrate*
- r. Irresponsible-and undependable*

II. WHAT EMOTION IS — WHY YOU ACT AND REACT THE WAY YOU DO.

- A. Emotion is the energy which makes the mind work — it supplies the energy for survival.
 - 1. Emotions — physical and mental feelings — are necessary for life and stimulate you to behave in a certain way
 - 2. In that sense, we are all emotional people.
- B. There is a difference, however, between emotional maturity and immaturity.
 - 1. The difference lies in whether you let this energy (emotion) rule you to your own hurt and the hurt of others, or whether you, through careful thought, put it to use constructively
 - 2. You can't stop the energy that is emotion, but you can control and direct it into constructive channels.
- C. How to control emotion.
 - 1. Realize there are negative and positive ways to react to an impulse that comes into your mind.
 - 2. Understand that you have been programmed from infancy to react the way you presently do.
 - 3. Realize, further, you can develop the ability to choose the way you want to react, rather than allowing it to be automatic. In other words, you can reprogram your behavior.
 - 4. The following quote shows how this process works.

"Once the lever has been pulled, the water (emotion) rushes on inevitably. There are, however, several channels in which the stream may be diverted, labeled: brave, fairly brave, cowardly, stupid, smart, immature; and the individual has the power to direct the stream, so that even though he cannot stem the tide, he can cause it to flow in the channel of his choice."
(*Discovering Ourselves*, Edward A. Strecker and Kenneth Appel.)

III. CAUSES OF NEGATIVE RESPONSES OR EMOTIONAL IMMATURITY.

- A. There are basically three factors that contribute to emotional immaturity.
 - 1. Conditioning.
This involves how you were treated as a little girl, as well as what was expected of you. If you were treated as a fragile, timid doll, rather than as a child, and that kind of behavior was reinforced with approval, either verbal or nonverbal, you probably carried this pattern into adulthood. As a female, you undoubtedly were expected to cry easily, pout, think superficially and selfishly. You also learned to tell "white lies" to manipulate your parents, and men. This background probably contributed to your present make-up as an adult.
 - 2. Modeling.
Children are imitators. Adults are your mirror, especially your parents or parent-figures. So whatever the model of the person you identified with as a child — your mother, schoolteacher, Hollywood star, etc., you will in some way become like that person.
 - 3. Cognitive Development.
This is the process by which you determined that certain behavior was or was not to your advantage. Crying, sulking or throwing tantrums to get your own way, became a lifelong manipulative device. It's called "water power" or "the silent treatment." These are negative techniques immature women have learned to use to get their desired results.

NOTE: There are as many different techniques in childhood that go into creating this manipulative phenomenon as there are individual families. These factors are meant only to give a general basis. Too much pampering on one side of the pendulum and neglect on the other will net the same results. An overpampered child will learn to expect too much from others without ever giving. Neglected children can grow up har-

boring such deep-seated anger and resentment that they become demanding and inconsiderate. An over-pampered and protected child develops a self-indulgent attitude that prevents him from coping with the frustrations and realities of his future life. On the other hand, a neglected child often has to learn to solve his own problems and can develop attitudes of independence and "omnipotence."

B. What you as a potential parent can do to teach your children emotional maturity and self-control.

1. Teach your children at a very early age that they can't have their own way by pouting, crying or displaying other selfish emotional outbursts.

Children starting out young will try temper tantrums to get what they want.

2. Don't allow them to be selfish.

Teach them they can't always be first or have their way. Help them learn to give in at times and let others have a chance.

3. Teach your child self-restraint.

To allow a child to uncontrollably vent his anger instills in him an attitude of self-will which leads to overt rebellion and hostility later in life.

4. Teach your child to handle his emotions.

Example from the parent can do a lot here. Emotions by themselves are not wrong; we all feel anger, hurt, love, lust, etc. What is wrong is failing to control them. You want a child who can express his/her emotions, but you don't want a child who can't control his life.

For example: The child who is angry when a friend wants one of his toys. Normally a child will strike out, hit, scream, bite or use violence to get his toy back. The child who is not taught from the beginning to control these emotions will very possibly become the adult who uses a knife or gun out of anger to get what he wants. The child who is self-ish, who grows up thinking the world owes him a living, becomes the adult who will rob a bank. He is unwilling to work for what he gets, but feels he deserves the money and takes what he wants.

5. Teach your children how to work.

Don't wait on them hand and foot. Often parents will do this unthinkingly. Out of love they place their children on a pedestal from which they never come down. Thus, the children are unrealistic about life and expect the outside world to treat them as their parents have.

6. Teach your child responsibility.

Give him or her jobs to do. Encourage your child to finish what he starts. Be sure he carries through with his work at home or school, and other projects such as music lessons, etc.

7. Allow your child to do the job himself.

Sometimes it is easier for Mom to do the job, rather than take the time to teach the child how to do it. It requires much time and patience for a child to learn; he is slower and often messier. But if he doesn't try, he won't learn.

8. Allow your child to make mistakes.

The child who has never made mistakes is the child who has never tried.

9. Let your child start making decisions.

You as a parent must guide the decisions he or she makes, but you need to help him build up his confidence in his ability to think for himself. After all, the time will come when he will be on his own with nobody to make his decisions for him. Often a person who is immature has never had an opportunity to think for himself. A young woman reared in this type of atmosphere will rely too heavily on her husband to make all her decisions, just as she leaned on her parents before. During courtship this may make a man feel good knowing his girl "needs" him. But after marriage when he is burdened down with every little decision and cannot rely on his wife to handle the things that come up every day, he will find she is not really a "help meet."

10. Give your children praise and encouragement.

This kind of attention builds up their confidence and self-esteem, and will motivate them to achieve higher levels of success.

A word of caution: Don't over-compliment so as to avoid building vanity and conceit into their personalities.

IV. HELPS IN BECOMING MORE MATURE.

A. START BY EXAMINING YOURSELF.

A good place to begin is to isolate your emotional hangups and become totally familiar with yourself. When you discover problems in your life that contribute to unwanted behavior, go to work on them. When you become emotional, ask yourself why you feel as you do. Be aware of "low days" and discipline yourself. There are definite reasons why your emotions are getting out of hand — seek to understand "why." Don't be satisfied with saying, "I'm just that way," or "My mother was like that," or "It runs in the family." God expects you to improve, change and grow.

Remember that coming to understand yourself gives peace of mind, eliminates stress, and imparts inner strength. Learn to identify your true feelings and call them what they are — anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred, etc. Don't be afraid or ashamed to examine your feelings. If they are wrong, ask God's forgiveness and ferret out the cause (this requires work). Deal with your problems from God's point of view, rather than from human instincts and feelings only. Most women, when asked why they feel a certain way, will answer "I don't know." Remember, cause is important. Be willing to change and work on your problems, and growth will come.

B. SPECIFIC THINGS TO DO.

1. Grow in confidence and self-esteem.

So often, emotional reaction results from a woman's feelings of inadequacy — physically, socially and professionally. That is, is she attractive? Is she accepted by the important people in her life? Does she feel like a mis-fit around her coworkers?

For example, have you gotten up in the morning and started to get ready for work. Your hair just won't do what you want it to, and you feel lousy in what you are wearing. It seems like nothing goes right the whole day. You're given an important assignment to do at work, but you fall apart emotionally because you started out the day lacking confidence and from then on things keep getting worse.

2. Learn to discipline yourself.

When confronted with some form of self-doubt, the mature woman contains her emotions and calmly devises a plan to deal with them.

When questioning her appearance, popularity and professional competency, rather than explode, she should consider those who excel in these areas and take pointers from them.

3. Overcome selfconsciousness.

Force yourself to talk to others, even if it makes you feel uncomfortable. Find out about their lives and be responsive to the things they are interested in. Take the initiative, even though painful, until you form a habit of meeting people. Accept invitations to do new things, instead of finding excuses to avoid them. Remember, action conquers fear; inaction prolongs it.

4. Overcome selfcenteredness.

Show concern and consideration for others. Specific ways you can do this:

1. Occasionally make a roommate's bed for her, especially if you know she has an unusually heavy schedule that day.
2. If you are going shopping, offer to pick up items she may need.
3. Keep in touch with your family — letters, calls, etc.
4. Build time in your schedule for other people by learning to listen and encourage.
5. Volunteer for class or club projects and get involved in a common goal with others.

5. Eliminate self-pity.

Recognize the problem and realize you have to reprogram your mind. When your feelings have been hurt, ask yourself the following questions: "How important is this really? What did I do to cause this? How am I to blame?" See things from the other's viewpoint and give him/her the benefit of the doubt. Don't harbor resentments — talk things out. Negative feelings, resentment and tension can actually cause ill health. Try to be more understanding, tolerant and forgiving of others and you will build happiness into your life. Don't blame others for your mistakes.

6. Learn to be a good loser.

Develop an attitude of having fun instead of being overly concerned with winning. Congratulate and praise others when they win — be a good loser.

7. Don't be flippant and scatterbrained.

Meet problems and obstacles as they arise. Take time to think things out. Learn to react slower, after you have had time to plan a course of action. Get your own mind in gear and make it produce — don't procrastinate. Get organized. Jot things down. Map out plans to solve problems. Set definite goals. Schedule your time instead of wasting it. Set priorities. Learn to say "NO." Think! Think! Think!

8. Select a mature female model (Proverbs 31).

Study others whom you consider a good example of maturity. Observe how they make decisions and conduct themselves. Make friends with serious-minded, Godfearing people.

9. Learn to think before you verbalize your feelings.

The idea of counting to ten before getting angry is not such a bad one. Sometimes we need a few moments to get our emotions in control before we say or do anything. Remember the scriptures on bridling the tongue. Often if you had thought first, many things would be left unsaid.

Learning to think before you act or speak provides another benefit. It teaches you to make quick decisions and reason rationally.

10. Learn to be flexible.

Ask yourself, "How can I get the results I want in a more constructive and uplifting way?" There are always alternatives. Break out of old patterns and the shop-worn ways you have always done things.

11. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Ask someone who's a close friend to work with you and remind you when you are slipping into old, unwanted habits. For the "knottier" problems, seek counseling from someone you respect, trust and who is qualified.

12. Take control of your life and learn to be tolerant of others.

Don't think in terms of winning or losing in a confrontation — this is what a child does. Look for points to agree with others instead of voicing your differences. Teach yourself tolerance — accept human differences and limitations. Learn patience. Realize it takes time for human beings to see themselves. Be adaptable and willing to change. Learn to give in to others and not insist on your own way. Think self-control, and seek the best results. Pray about it, and God will help you.

V. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE EMOTIONALLY MATURE?

- A. A simple definition of "mature" is having completed natural growth. A mature woman will display certain characteristics that are a joy to experience.
- B. Another definition is: The art of living in peace with that which we cannot change, the courage to change that which SHOULD be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.
- C. Summary of characteristics that describe an emotionally mature woman:
 1. Composed.
 2. Reserved.
 3. Purposeful.
 4. Has sense of values.
 5. Goals defined.

6. Able to cope with crises.
7. Cultured and refined.
8. Able to control anger and settle differences.
9. Patient.
10. Determined.
11. Capable of facing unpleasantness and frustration.
12. Humble.
13. Joyful and happy.
14. Compassionate.

D. How to attain emotional maturity.

In all relationships, think of your emotional reactions and how you will affect other people. This behavior must be learned and developed. It is a change of attitude from a state of taking to a state of giving and sharing. It comes through godly knowledge, creative thinking, right decisions and strong self-discipline. Emotional maturity does not crucify or anesthetize emotions — it guides and controls them with right knowledge and true wisdom.

E. Plan now to grow in emotional maturity.

Determine the weak areas you need to overcome. Set goals and guidelines. Establish checkpoints for reevaluation along the way. Don't be discouraged if you occasionally slip and make mistakes — concentrate on the things you do right, and the many times you succeeded in mastering a situation. This will help you to gain confidence, pick up momentum, and eventually reach the fulfillment of your goals.

VI. SUMMARY.

In essence, emotional maturity can be summed up in I Cor.13:4-7, in the Living Bible:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud; Never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him."

Emotional maturity is learning to develop love to its fullest extent so that it becomes our chosen response — the automatic channel into which we divert the stream of all other human emotions.

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FLASH!

The following paragraph was just handed me by my secretary, Barbara Saye, after the final notes were typed:

"Two prominent psychiatrists, Glasser and Harrington, did a study of patients in a mental hospital, and came up with the following opinion:

"There is no such thing as mental illness. These are people who have mastered the art of irresponsibility. They pass the buck to other people. There is a moment when they have an opportunity to choose their course of behavior. Some people are childlike, never having grown up. They must be taught to assume responsibility for their own behavior. When they start a tantrum, command them STOP THAT! YOU'RE ACTING CRAZY!"

"Over 70% of the patients treated by Glasser and Harrington were able to be released from the mental hospital and return to a normal life within 17 months of treatment. They had been conditioned to assume responsibility for their own actions and reactions."

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