



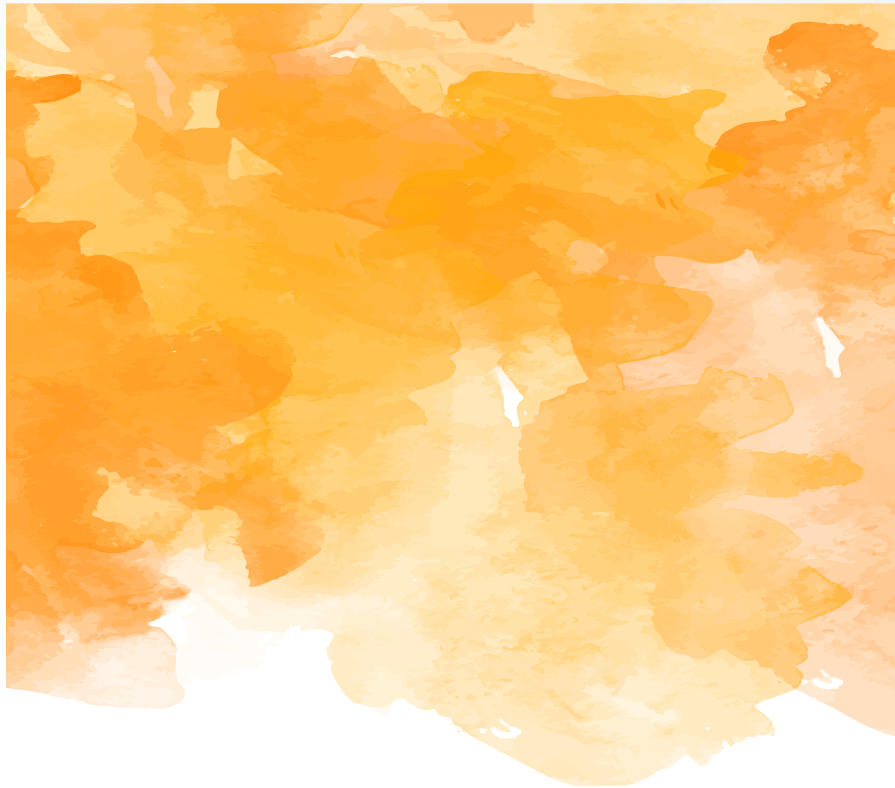
Life Model Works™

FREE RESOURCE

EXCERPT OF GROWING A MORE HUMAN COMMUNITY

VOLUME I GROWING ME: BECOMING A CHILD

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THE LIFE CYCLE FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

The world's languages reflect an intuitive sense about maturity. Every language I know has a word for a baby, child, adult, parent and elder. For millennia we have passed through these stages and transformations. At each stage more is expected and that development requires the learning, practice and judgment we call maturity.

Teaching about maturity around the USA allowed me to watch people assess their personal maturity. About three out of four men I encountered functioned at the infant level of maturity. Infant maturity is not the same as infant age. These men are well beyond the infant age but how well they knew themselves revealed infant issues were not clarified or resolved. We will have much to say about these infant needs and tasks. Our goal is reaching the maturity that matches our age.

Over my lifespan the average level of maturity in the USA has seem to drop rather than rise. Maturity is a people skill and best acquired and developed through practice with people. Time spent interacting with screens rather than people is increasing. In addition, we are increasingly mobile and every time we move we lose some part of our relational world.

We need maturity maps and skill practice to successfully raise children to be adults, partners, parents and elders at the same rate that we age. We need to know what pace to set and what pace is sustainable. Our maturity will lag if we follow guides who do not know the way or lack the skills to get us there. Life, like mountain terrain, can present very different challenges at different stages. Let us consider some of the identity goals we reach by growing *ME* (an individual), *US* (a family) and *WE* (a community).

THE FIRST GOAL: BABY

The first major challenge for growing *ME* begins at birth and lasts until about age four. Babies must receive grace – the certain knowledge that they are special. Parents and community look at a baby's unformed identity through the eyes of heaven and watch what will grow there.

In chapter two we will examine all the experiences needed at this INFANT STAGE. These first four years are the baby years. Babies need to receive all good things and learn to express themselves. Each baby learns the value of "just being me" without having to earn value.

Ideally, babies learn all the basics of self-care. Later skills will build upon these basics. Many babies will not be taught to grow their relational self properly. Key self-care skills are often omitted. Abuse and neglect create an entirely wrong sense of who their *self* is and what a *self* needs.

Infants must experience strong, loving, caring bonds with parents. These bonds must meet their needs without babies having to ask. Infants must receive life, and learn to express the life that is in them, to everyone's delight. During infancy babies learn to live joyfully in the protected environment of a mother's world.

A baby's identity will either be built around joy or fear. The infant whose brain is filled with joy becomes strong. Joyful babies will not fear the trails or mountains. Keeping baby from beginning a life of fear requires breaking life into baby-sized pieces. Each effort leads to letting baby rest in a timely way. The baby years are synchronized to baby's needs.

When life comes in baby size, infants learn to synchronize and control their minds and emotions. They learn to quiet themselves and soon are ready to synchronize with others. Relationships that are both joyful and peaceful result from getting this timing right. Video screens do not provide this joy and rest training.

Four years of infancy prepares babies for weaning. In our culture, weaning from the breast or bottle is rarely timed to coincide with when the child is ready for self-care. We rush our children into independence as fast as possible. Weaning from infancy changes a baby into a child. Once babies have learned to take basic care of their needs, they can transform into children who can begin living a less sheltered life in their father's world. Children move from life in their home toward life in both home and community.

It may well be that many infants and children no longer experience either a mother's world or a father's world and cannot distinguish the differences that have existed through human history between the two. Some thought should be given to whether this recent change in child rearing is contributing to the rapid increase of insecure attachments, depression, fragility, isolation and anxiety in young adults of the 21st century.¹

Reaching where we should be on the maturity trail begins where we actually are. Without the experiences we needed it is inevitable that our maturity will get stuck in infancy. Missing maturity does not mean we lack value, it just feels that way if our infant need for grace went unmet. To correct deficits and build successive maturity stages we must go back to learn what we missed. No one likes to be called a "baby" or an "infant" when they are older so it is hard to pick a name for this stage that doesn't offend us later when we think of remediation.

The goal for infancy is for babies to organize a strong, joyful, synchronized identity.

THE SECOND GOAL: CHILD

The CHILD STAGE begins as the baby becomes a child at about age four. Once weaned, and able to begin self-care, children can become quite upset if they are called babies. Even in their own minds a transformation has taken place. We will explore the child's world in chapter seven.

A child is more complex than a baby. Children must learn to ask for the things they need. They must make themselves understandable to others. Children must discover what satisfies them each day. To do this, each child must learn to act exactly like themselves—like the identity in that child's heart. Children must develop their talents and resources. Their performance must be self-expression but not as a way to earn love. Children must learn to receive and give life freely. They must learn to do hard things, things that they don't feel like doing at the time, but which are important and satisfying later. Each child learns how to pack and carry their own backpack, read a map, keep moving on the trail and enjoy the view.

In preparation for adulthood, children learn the "big picture" of life. This overall picture of life and maturity becomes their "topo" map. The history of their own family will illustrate how the big picture of

1 Konrath SH, Chopik WJ, Hsing CK, O'Brien E. Changes in adult attachment styles in American college students over time: a meta-analysis. *Pers Soc Psychol Rev.* 2014 Nov;18(4):326-48. doi:10.1177/1088868314530516. Epub 2014 Apr 12. PMID: 24727975.

life applies to people they know. Who has matured? Who has some obvious gaps? Family history tells them where *ME* is on *my* map.

The goal for childhood is to teach children to take care of one person—themselves. Children learn to participate in life with grace by being special in the company of special people. Children learn to see themselves through the eyes of heaven and cultivate what is growing within them. Taking care of self must be second nature before they can take care of two or more people at the same time, as adults must do.

THE THIRD GOAL: ADULT

Ideally, the ADULT STAGE begins at age thirteen. Many in the Boomer generation set a goal of never growing up to be adults only to lament the lack of adults in subsequent generations. Growing an adult identity is the topic of the second book in the *Growing a More Human Community* series. We will look at adult maturity in ADULTS: *Growing Us*. Like other transformations, becoming an adult is physical as well as mental and social. A young adult's identity will try to reorganize itself but without an older guide, it will end up in a disorganized state.

It takes a while to climb the many peaks that separate a self-centered child from a both-centered adult. A mature child can take excellent care of one person, themselves. Given the necessary guidance, young adults can satisfy the needs of more than one person at a time. Adult terrain is where one learns to drive a hard bargain, fair for oneself and fair for the other. Adults protect the needs of others as though they were as important as their own. When adults do business, the person they are dealing with gets equal, fair treatment. This stage of development usually takes people into their early twenties. By that time, adults should be able to bargain hard, get a fair deal, not be intimidated by others, protect others from themselves when necessary and take care of a small group to everyone's satisfaction.

Adults want their effects to reflect their personal character and style. Everything they do must meet this heart-based standard. Adults share grace by making sure everyone is treated as special. Adults learn to see others through the eyes of heaven in order to grow the best group identity. Any group, such as a family or church, where the preponderance of participants have not reached adult maturity will be dysfunctional. Without the eyes of heaven the group will not be transformative and lapse into raising their own status through performance and image management.

Adult identity finds its highest challenge in marriage. People are ready for marriage near the end of the adult stage. By that time they are proficient in sharing life for mutual satisfaction. Because the two are both adults, they can each take care of themselves and others simultaneously. This kind of partnership is characteristically adult. Sharing life in a way that creates a mutually satisfying story—or imprint on history—brings great joy to adults.

The goal for adults is to become a satisfying part of history. Adults know they impact other people.

Therefore, adults carefully insure that their impact on history (my story) is a good one.

THE FOURTH GOAL: PARENT

The PARENT STAGE uses all we have learned in the first three stages to reach our highest peak—giving life. Parents already know what they need and feel. Parents look out for others like they do for themselves. They now learn to give without receiving in return, as we will see in second book of this set called ADULTS: *Growing Us*.

We know that we are parents when our child keeps us up all night, screaming in our ear, spitting up on our shirts and then showing no appreciation for our efforts. We could have bargained hard, like adults, and said, "I'll stay up with you tonight but tomorrow night you must carry me around," but we didn't. Instead we gave without demanding in return. This is the mountain peak we have trained for all our lives. As we start this ascent, we know we are parents.

Let's say that the father stays up this time. The father knows what he needs. He already reached his infant goals. No one stays up all night and says, "I never need to sleep." He can express his feelings about it as well, "I'm tired but I love my child." He can take care of himself in the morning using the skills he learned as a boy. If and when his wife takes over, both are satisfied with the baby's care. Although at work he drives a hard bargain, at home he climbs above the tree line into unselfish giving. Only a mature person who has completed the first three stages can enjoy the climb.

Parents give grace, the sense of being special, to their children. Parents see their children through the eyes of heaven rather than through their own needs and expectations. Parents pass on the gift of grace by unselfish giving. Children learn about having value without having to earn it. By staying up all night a parent says, "My child, you have great value to me. Even if you keep me up all night, spit up on me, mess in your diapers and scream in my ear, even if you do not care that I am here, you have more than enough value to lose sleep over." That is parent maturity.

Parents represent God to their family. The chance to portray God is the greatest honor that anyone can have. The parent becomes an example of God's heart and character through unselfish giving. This takes a while, and parents are getting the hang of it about the time the children become teens. By that time, unselfishness should be second nature to Mom and Dad – they will need it.

To be a giver of life, a parent must have received enough life to spare some. Parents must share a home where they can protect, serve and enjoy. They must find the resources that allow their children to mature.

The goal of parenthood is to give life joyfully. As parents give life, children grow strong.

THE FIFTH GOAL: ELDER

Although many an older person has illustrated the need for more maturity, not much has been written about how seniors develop elder maturity at their age. We will study the ELDER STAGE in volume three of this series titled *SENIORS: Growing We the People*.

After their children have become adult men and women, a truly *grand*-parent becomes a guide. Elders help those who are climbing for the first time. They rescue those who didn't bring maps, forgot their supplies, or even got lost. Elders give life to the "familyless"—the widows, orphans and strangers. They help their community to mature and reach its identity.

Many people could use an elder or a *grandparent*. In our society we expect older people to buy a motorhome and drive into the sunset. We, therefore, have few elders, few spare parents, few guides and few people helping those in need. There is a great lack of elders in our churches and communities.

An elder is a parent to a community. Elders see their community's group identity through the eyes of heaven. God and God's people both know and see what is special in others. Elders help those who have no one who sees them as special to discover grace. Elders provide the same unselfish care for those who are

not biologically their children as they gave their own families. They remind everyone what kind of people we are and what we value.

Cohesion is built by elders because they live transparent lives. They no longer hide what they feel so they can be “cool.” They are real in ways they haven’t been since they were children. They do not give self-protection the highest value because they have learned to suffer well. Elders don’t withdraw when things go wrong because they know how often people fail to live from their hearts. Elders are steady in good times and bad. Through authentic involvement, elders resynchronize their community from its broken relationships, failures and failed trust. Elders may not do much of the actual community repair work but they help others get their timing right. “This is not the time for that,” they say and then again, “this is the time to do something else.”

Elders must have a community of their own, a place where each elder is recognized and encouraged. Elders must be given a proper place in the community structure for they will not force their way. We need guides who have been to the mountain. Old mountaineers die when they have no one to guide.

"I know just what you need," must echo again in the canyons.

When elders die, it is a time of great blessing. Every elder prepares to face the greatest human transformation—a plunge into Iceberg Lake. This is the final decontamination process from all that may have gone wrong on their journey. Everything about elders that received and gave life emerges beyond Iceberg Lake. Anything about them that gave death stays in the lake forever.

The goal for elders is to help their community grow up. Elders raise communities the way parents raise children. Under elders, communities reach their full maturity.