

Truth or Consequences

In the Shadows of Clocks, Calendars and Caskets

As damaging as telling a lie is, living a lie (trying to con others – often deceiving ourselves) has far greater negative consequences; yes, life really is one of truth or consequences! As said earlier in *Rotten Green Bananas* concerning maturing - we can wait to see what happens in life and, at the end, probably judge fairly correctly to what extent we have matured well; the **victim's** way of thinking. Or, during life, we can take the **dynamic** approach of seeking to find and apply the principles that lead to appropriate maturing and its many paybacks.

One key necessity and attribute to properly maturing is being realistic/truthful – working within the constraints and possibility of what is rather than believing the childish (immature) notion that we make and control truth and reality. Or to put it another way, maturing perceives the linkage between truth and the most likely benefits/consequences (suppressing the driving forces of “I like . . .” “I don't like . . .” and doing what is better instead). We don't expect a child to understand they cannot healthfully exist and grow on only sweets – we do expect one older to eat a balanced diet; and, as they age, to consider (mature in) this more and more. Likewise, we should expect an older person to understand they cannot remain sedentary day after day and maintain good health!

So what is the common feature in all areas of maturity? Discipline – an analysis completed, decision made, implemented and kept that it is beneficial to form a routine and habit of doing x to achieve y – to understand the sure linkage of truth or consequences (good and bad).

Another way of looking at and defining maturity is that it is wisdom obtained and applied. Three of the basic and very important, but often ignored, truths are that we live within the shadows of:

Clocks - We have 24, and only 24, hours each day; everything we do, within a day, must be completed within this 24 hour context.

Calendars - Most of us live the greater part of a century – everything we do will be done in this relatively short period of time.

Caskets - Eternity is a long time and the sure “destination” after all the 24 hours, months and years have passed. Rather than ignoring this reality we should embrace it, understanding it casts a huge shadow (good or bad) over all of life!

Clock ← Less scary – Calendar – Less forgiving → Casket

The clock is logically less scary than the calendar and the calendar less of a threat than the casket since the clock is more forgiving than the calendar and both of these less frightening than the casket which is even less lenient. In other words, we can make a mistake in frittering away a day and not do too much damage; squander a week, month or year and more harm will result. And get to the end of life, find it was largely wasted or misfocused and the impact will be eternal. Thus, it is very a very immature and dangerous approach to take care of the pressing/immediate concerns and problems assuming the long-term will take of itself. The old saying: “If you take care of today, the future will take care of itself” is not only not true, but potentially very damaging. Yes, we should concentrate on taking care of today, but more important is taking care of today in light of the future. 100 miles an

hour is only better than 10 miles an hour if we are headed in the right direction (remember *The Tortoise and the Hare!*).

The Chain of Maturity

We all begin life immature in many ways – maturities are learned, not natural. And properly viewed, maturity will be viewed as a chain of individual links (maturities/immaturities); maturity in one area is synergistic to other areas of life, but, that said, everyone has relative weak links for which they will benefit by concentrating on and strengthening them. It is too easy to accept our strengths (maturities) while ignoring, or worse yet excusing, our immaturities. What damaging impact, for an otherwise very successful person, have we experienced or seen due to a single area of immaturity? Thus a better question we can ask ourselves than “Am I mature?” (you can be sure the answer we will give ourselves) is “In what area(s) am I relatively immature?”

Everyone has uneven spots in their maturity so we rightly think and talk about our maturities or immaturities since they are multiple and plural rather than a single unit as we too often think of maturity. Again, as examples that can possibly better reveal aspects of ourselves, O.J. and Clinton/Spitzer offer public examples and demonstrations of great immaturities (in some glaring area) alongside obvious, general and significant maturity – no one achieves what these men did without far greater than normal intelligence and maturity. So while maturity is synergistic (improvement in 1 area normally has a positive effect on multiple other areas) no one has achieved ultimate consistent maturity. And just as maturity is synergistic, immaturity likewise can affect multiple areas of life often very significantly.

Some key examples of disciplines of maturity (this perceiving of the linkage between truth and the most likely consequences and, in the process, suppressing the otherwise immature driving forces of “I like . . .” “I don’t like . . .” and doing what is true and better instead):

Personal hygiene – by the time a child is in their teens they should have a pretty good handle on, be mature, in this area. Unfortunately too often we half learn what we need to, only to have to fully learn, mature, in it later in life. Or we fail to notice the conditions and issues that occur as we age, implementing appropriate further disciplines in this area. Parents, complete the task of teaching your children these important disciplines! And as we age we need to be careful not to let our guard down – it takes more, year by year, to keep ourselves cleaned up and cleaned out.

Learning to properly and positively relate in family and social settings – maturity, in this area, is evidenced largely by the developed (it certainly isn’t natural) discipline of sharing and considering others rather than being selfish; this again is a maturity that should be well begun in childhood. Parents that neglect, indulge and spoil children retard this area of maturation (often because both parents are so busy “making a buck”). We should not be surprised that there is now greater difficulty in developing mature spousal relationships (the higher divorce rates clear evidence of truth or consequences in this area) when children haven’t been properly taught the lessons/disciplines of mature family and peer relationships.

Truthfulness – this is another learned maturity and discipline; and the sooner understood the better (the greater the blessings of being, and having a reputation, as a truthful person and less damaging the consequences of lying to ourselves and others)!

Education — failing to embrace and become mature here will result in a person not preparing themselves to meet their potential and, consequently, typically being frustrated in a dead-end job. Nowhere in the world is more money spent, per pupil, on education than in America. Yet, because many educators and parents are not teaching the truth that education is more a function of the discipline of learning than of teaching (there is a necessary discipline and effort to learning!), the consequences, for many students, are grave — they simply are not prepared for what life offers and demands of them.

Falling prey to destructive addictive substances and behaviors — many children, in looking at their parents, can't wait to be grown (or “What the heck — why not now!”) so they can legally (if not illegally) indulge in activities that offer little or no benefit, while having great potential for damage. Who begins drinking expecting to be an alcoholic? Yet, a significant percent of Americans have alcohol, drug (prescribed or illegal), gambling, pornography . . . addictions (immaturities) often significantly damaging other areas of their lives. There are consequences to not knowing and following the truths in this area. Parents, by example, should be demonstrating a fear and avoidance of (rather than dabbling with) substances and activities that offer little or no reward and potentially great damage.

To pursue just one common example, who would dare be so reactionary, behind the times and silly to demonstrate, for their children, a fear and avoidance of alcohol? There is certainly no great danger with someone having wine with dinner or a beer now and then, so what is the big deal? Only that a mature parent should understand the truth and consequences of alcohol; if it is, in fact, so benign, why do so many people have such a great problem with it? What are the benefits of alcohol that would merit playing Russian roulette with it? As a society we are far too immature in viewing and using alcohol! And it doesn't make it better that we have this in common with most of the rest of the World, that “everybody else is doing it.”

Work — too much and long or too little; both are immaturities of not adequately or properly recognizing the linkage between work and other, key, areas of life. There are basic truths, maturities, we should learn about work to achieve the positive rather than negative consequences of this important part of life.

Money and Finances — again, the seeds of this life-long immaturity are typically sown in childhood as children watch their parents binge and act irresponsibly in matters of money. There are age appropriate money lessons/maturities children should be taught (in the context of their parents being good rather than bad models). Many, otherwise smart, practical, mature people, achieving much in many areas of their life, are negatively impacted by an immaturity with money — controlling it and their “I like and want!” emotions (maturing through appropriate disciplines) rather than it controlling and mastering them. There are financial truths that must be followed to provide good and positive consequences within the context of the great plenty in which we live; yet many people, in spite of the great surrounding abundance, only experience negative consequences from the potential blessings. And the greatest of these truths is that we must be thankful for what we have or there will be very negative consequences.

Spiritual development and maturity — again, children will best begin this life-long challenge by having parents who are good models (walking the walk more than talking the talk) combined with age appropriate spiritual learning and disciplines. There is no one who fails to consider and

mature spiritually that will be anything other than shallow; the spiritual has too much impact on other parts of life for anyone to significantly mature without considering this area of real life. Other maturities are important – the truths and consequences here are eternal!

There is a physical maturity most people, to their detriment, do not mature into. Just as the spiritual links to and impacts most other areas of life, the physical also does. To be effective and ever improving, all disciplines and areas of maturities must be periodically reviewed and updated as times and conditions change. And we, likewise, need to be aware of seemingly totally new areas requiring attention and maturity; physical maturity, and the related disciplines, is one such example.

Everything may be moving along fairly well and then one day (or it seems like one day) we notice physical decline and slowing. It is easy to give into the prevailing immaturity of our surroundings accepting this decline, chasing after the promised “magic” potions, procedures and pills or maturing and developing physical disciplines that will positively and significantly improve our physical condition – yes, it is possible that “your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” ^{Ps 103:5} There is a sure linkage, after age 50, between exercise (investment) and health (benefit); and in no other physical and material area of life will we likely see a greater payback for an investment; the positive consequences will be great for embracing the simple and sure truths in this area!

There are other areas of maturities/immaturities, but these are some of the foundational ones. Unfortunately, however, we are in an age and era that too often ignores or outright denies common-sense and basic (at least to the mature) truths known, taught and accepted in the past; and for those doing this, great potential opportunities are lost with, instead, penalties being the end result. If, on the other hand, we seek, find, embrace, implement these truths in our lives, through disciplines, we can benefit from the positive (living beneficially in and around the great material wealth surrounding us, using the “miracles of modern medicine” to assist us in maintaining health in conjunction with activity . . .) while reducing or eliminating the negatives (falling prey to addictive urges and substances, adultery, lying, ignoring our spiritual being . . .). Truths/Lies – Positive/Negative Consequences! The opportunities and challenges are, at the same time, great and frightening; great if and where we are mature, frightening when and where we are immature!

One key necessity and attribute to properly maturing is being realistic/truthful – working within the constraints and possibility of what is rather than accepting the childish and immature notion that we make and control our own realities. Or to put it another way, maturing perceives truths and the linkage to consequences, both good and bad; realistically comparing costs and the most likely benefits (suppressing the driving force of “I like . . .” “I don’t like . . .” and doing what is better instead). The common feature in all areas of maturity is discipline – an analysis completed, decision made, implemented and kept that it is beneficial to form a routine and habit to do x to achieve y. Or another helpful way of looking at and defining maturity is that it is wisdom obtained and applied.

Remember the clock (the day). Don’t forget the calendar (the months and years). But, most important, and a sure foundation for all truths and consequences, don’t neglect the eternal!

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
look at the earth beneath;

the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.
But my salvation will last forever,
my righteousness will never fail. Isa 51:6

He whose ear heeds discipline
lodges among the wise.
He who spurns discipline
hates himself . . .
The fear of the LORD
is the discipline of wisdom. Pr 15:31-33