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OPPOSITES **1** ATTRACT

ONE OF THE MOST ENDEARING French fairy tales of all time—*Beauty and the Beast*—has spawned Broadway musicals, a TV series, an animated Disney film, board games, a Nintendo action thriller, ice shows, and thousands of Web sites, all celebrating the proposition that opposites can and do attract. These days, the phrase is even employed as shorthand to convey a certain meaning; for example, when Dennis Rodman and Carmen Electra got married, we knew exactly what the entertainment media meant when they called the union a “beauty and the beast” marriage.

In its original form, *Beauty and the Beast* is the story of two people who couldn't be more opposite—Vincent and Katherine. Vincent is a ferocious, disagreeable character who meets the good-hearted, virginal Katherine. She sees beneath his contemptible appearance and gruff mannerisms and falls in love with the furry creature, warts and all. He falls in love as well, but the Beast is sure his love can never be requited because of his ugly appearance. When Katherine trusts her heart and accepts him unconditionally, Vincent is transformed into a smooth-shaven, handsome young man, and they live happily ever after.

If only life imitated art. In counseling couples over the last five decades, I've come across numerous "beauty and the beast" personality conflicts that top the list of marital discord.

"Why did I get married in the first place?" is the typical refrain I hear from one of the partners. "We have a hopeless personality conflict! If I say my dress is black, he disagrees and says it's navy blue. We argue about what time it is. We can't even agree on what restaurant serves the best Italian food."

Why do couples bring out the worst in each other? Why do opposite personalities attract each other? Why do two people who are so different get married?

To answer these questions, we need to become acquainted with what makes people tick. Many suggestions have been offered: economic background, length of education, the neighborhood we grew up in, and our ethnic heritage. These characteristics have a bearing on our differences, but so does our temperament—something we inherited in our family genes—and we really don't have much say-so in the matter.

You can find many different theories of personality types in mall bookstores. For the purposes of this discussion, I would like to refer to my book *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, in which I outlined four basic temperaments and detailed the strengths and weaknesses of these temperaments. My purpose was to show that the Holy Spirit working in the lives of Christians can help them overcome their weaknesses. Allow me to present a condensed description of the four temperaments to show why opposites attract each other.

First of all, human temperament is a fascinating study! Temperament includes the combination of inborn traits that subconsciously affect a person's behavior. These traits, passed on by the genes, include intelligence, race, sex, and many other factors. The

alignment of temperament traits stems from four basic types. Many of us are a mixture of temperaments, representing characteristics passed along by parents and grandparents. One temperament type usually dominates in individuals, but strains of one or two others will always be found. For instance, extroverts are predominantly sanguine or choleric in temperament, while introverts are predominantly melancholy or phlegmatic.

Before we dive further into understanding these temperaments, let me state that I know words such as *sanguine* and *choleric* aren't used much in today's language. They are time-honored descriptions of temperament, however, and if you will stick with me and learn them, you will discover a great deal about yourself and your partner. Temperament is an important facet of marital happiness because it helps explain why people with differing personalities are attracted to each other.

One more point: It would be much simpler to report that only four temperaments exist. While I agree that one of the four dominates in each individual's personality, we all have a secondary temperament that to some extent influences our behavior. For instance, my temperament is choleric-sanguine, while Bev is more phlegmatic-sanguine. Keep that point in mind as you read more about the four temperaments.

THE SANGUINE TEMPERAMENT

Men and women with the sanguine temperament are warm, buoyant, and lively. They are naturally receptive, and external impressions easily find their way to their hearts. Their emotions—rather than reflective thoughts—are the basis of most of their decisions.

Sanguine types enjoy people, shy away from solitude, and are at their best when surrounded by friends, where they can take

center stage. They have an endless repertoire of interesting stories to tell, making them fun to be around at parties or social gatherings.

Mr. or Mrs. Sanguine is never at a loss for words. Sanguines often speak before thinking, but their open sincerity has a disarming effect on their listeners. Their freewheeling, extroverted ways of living make them the envy of more timid temperament types.

Their noisy, blustering, and friendly demeanor makes them appear more confident than they really are, but their energy and lovable disposition get them through the rough spots of life. People have a way of excusing their weaknesses by saying, “That’s just the way Sam is,” or “Lisa’s always running behind, but you can still count on her.”

Cheerful, fun-to-be-around sanguine people enrich the world. They make good salespeople, hospital workers, teachers, flight attendants, news anchors, actors, actresses, public speakers, and community leaders.

Back when they were in high school, the sanguine types were voted “Most Likely to Succeed,” but they often fall short of this prediction because of weak wills. Sanguines who find themselves ineffective and undependable tend to become restless, undisciplined, egocentric, and emotionally explosive.

THE CHOLERIC TEMPERAMENT

The choleric temperament is found in people who are hot, quick, active, practical, and strong-willed. They tend to be self-sufficient, independent, decisive, and opinionated, finding it easy to make decisions for themselves as well as for others.

Mr. or Mrs. Choleric thrives on activities. Choleric love to be involved—not because they seek stimulation but rather because they want to stimulate others with their endless ideas. Their

ambitious minds are always “on,” planning long-range projects and making snap decisions. They do not vacillate under pressure of what others think. They take definite stands on issues and can often be found crusading for great social causes according to their political bents.

Adversaries seldom frighten them; conversely, choleric welcome the challenge because they want to prove they are right. They possess dogged determination and often succeed where others fail—not because their plans are better than anyone else’s but because they push long after others have become discouraged and quit. These natural-born leaders will storm the hill or take on city hall. Their motto: *Either lead, follow, or get out of the way.*

The choleric’s emotional nature is the least developed part of their temperament. They do not suffer fools gladly, nor do they sympathize easily with others. Male choleric are often embarrassed or disgusted by the sight of other men crying. They have little appreciation for the fine arts because their primary interests lie in the utilitarian values of life.

They are quick to recognize opportunities and equally as quick at diagnosing the best way to make use of them. Although choleric are generally well-organized, details bore them. They are not given to contemplation; they prefer making quick, intuitive appraisals. Once they have defined a path, they will run roughshod over individuals who stand in their way, although these opportunists have a Machiavellian streak that is not above sneaky end arounds.

Many of the world’s great generals and leaders have been choleric. They make good executives, idea men, producers, dictators, or criminals, depending on their moral standards. They can be no-nonsense department heads, cops, or Sunday school directors. I remember a Vacation Bible School director our church had

one time. That summer, our VBS program was the best-run one ever, but the following year, we couldn't get any workers because the director had been so rude to everybody.

Cholerics, male or female, have a hard time with people skills. They don't need babying or pampering, and it's hard for them to adapt their styles to the needs of other people. Cholerics are difficult folks to live with. They can come across as hot-tempered, cruel, impetuous, and self-sufficient. The person with this temperament is often more appreciated by friends and associates than by members of his or her family.

THE MELANCHOLY TEMPERAMENT

Melancholy people are often dark, moody individuals prone to analyzing everything to death. Nonetheless, they can be self-sacrificing, gifted perfectionists with sensitive emotional natures. No one appreciates strolling the great halls of the Louvre Museum more than melancholic people do. That's why many of the world's great artists, musicians, inventors, philosophers, and educators have been of the melancholy temperament.

These self-described introverts come hardwired with a variety of moods dominated by their emotions. Sometimes melancholics' moods will lift them to heights of ecstasy ("I just loved the new Julia Roberts movie!"), but five minutes later, they can become gloomy and depressed ("I just can't seem to snap out of it"). If this occurs, spouses need to watch out. Withdrawn melancholics can be quite antagonistic and hard on a marriage.

When they're in a good mood, melancholics are your best buddies and friends. Unlike sanguine men and women, however, they do not make friends easily. Melancholics are initially reserved when meeting people, preferring for new acquaintances to come to them. They are perhaps the most dependable of all the tempera-

ments because their perfectionist tendencies do not permit them to let others down. Their natural reluctance to remain in the background is not an indication that they don't like people but that they are simply reluctant to take people at face value. Thus, they have their guards up and act suspiciously when others shower them with attention.

Melancholics have an uncanny ability to figure out what to do when obstacles are placed in their paths. If a project needs to be completed within a seemingly impossible time frame, you can be sure a melancholic will find a way. This foresight contrasts sharply with choleric, who rarely anticipate problems but are confident they can handle anything that comes their way.

Mr. or Mrs. Melancholy usually finds the greatest meaning in life through personal sacrifice. Melancholics are quite willing to put aside their personal desires if the sacrifice is worth it and accomplishes something for the greater good. This turns their cranks, as they say. Finally, melancholy people have much natural potential when energized by the Holy Spirit.

THE PHLEGMATIC TEMPERAMENT

Everyone loves to be around those with phlegmatic temperaments. They act calm, cool, and collected. They travel through life in the slow lane, content to take it easy. Life for phlegmatic people is one happy, pleasant experience after another, which is why they avoid entanglements with others as much as possible.

Phlegmatic types seldom get ruffled. They are the types who rarely express anger or laugh until tears are running down their cheeks. Their temperament remains steady, like Old Man River. Beneath their cool, reticent, almost timid personalities, phlegmatics draw from a good combination of abilities. They feel more

emotion than appears on the surface and have a great capacity to appreciate the fine arts and the better things of life.

Since phlegmatics enjoy people, they do not lack for friends. They are natural-born raconteurs who love to hear a good story as much as they enjoy telling one. Known for their dry sense of humor, they have the ability to see the lighter side in everyday situations. Their retentive minds delight in poking fun at the other temperament types. Annoyed by the aimless, restless enthusiasm of sanguine people, they often confront sanguines with the futility of such enthusiasm (“Sorry, Charlie, but it’s not going to work”). They are disgusted by the gloomy moods of melancholy folks and have been known to ridicule them (“Get a life”). They can even throw ice water on the bubbling plans of choleric (“Fuggettaboutit”).

Phlegmatics make great armchair quarterbacks, preferring to be spectators in life and keep others at arm’s length. They like routine; anyone trying to get them to step out of their comfort zone will be met with reluctance. This does not mean, however, that phlegmatics cannot appreciate the need for action or empathize with the difficulties of others.

For instance, choleric view social injustice with a crusading spirit, causing them to say, “Let’s get a committee organized and do something about this!” A phlegmatic would be more likely to respond by saying, “These conditions are terrible! Why doesn’t someone do something about them?” Phlegmatics are often kind-hearted and sympathetic, which is why the world has greatly benefited from their gracious nature. They make excellent diplomats, office managers, accountants, elementary-school teachers, scientists, account reps, or other meticulous, detail-oriented workers.

The chief weakness of phlegmatics, which often keeps them from fulfilling their potential, is their dearth of motivation. Some

husbands will say this about their phlegmatic wives: “She is a wonderful wife and mother, but she is one lousy housekeeper.” A frustrated wife might say, “Joe is a wonderful husband, but he can’t seem to get a promotion.”

Although they are easy to live with, phlegmatics have a care-less, low-pressure way of living that can irritate a hyperactive partner to no end.

Phlegmatics make good companions to their children because they find it easy to stop what they are doing and play with the children.

WHY OPPOSITES ATTRACT

The subconscious mind has far more influence on us than most people realize. This is graphically seen in the way we select our friends—and particularly in our choice of a life partner. Loud, gregarious, and extroverted sanguines subconsciously wish they could control themselves better. When they return from a party, the realization that they chattered endlessly and tended to dominate conversations often, in retrospect, embarrasses them.

Sweet, quiet phlegmatics or melancholics subconsciously think, *I wish I could be more outgoing and expressive*. It is very easy to see why these contrasting types will be interested in each other when they meet. He is everything she wishes to be, and she is just what he would secretly like to be; thus, they seem to complement each other. This principle is subconsciously at work every time a person singles out the one he or she desires to marry. In fact, no temperament is subconsciously barred to a person but his or her own. The important thing to note is that people are attracted to each other on the basis of strengths, but each natural strength has a corresponding weakness.

WEAKNESSES APPEAR LATER

Most couples are so head over heels in love that they see only the *good parts* of their fiancé or fiancée. It doesn't take much time after the honeymoon—a few days, a few weeks—before the novelty of being married wears off and each partner's flaws become known. Every human being comes fully equipped with a bucketful of weaknesses, though this news may come as a shock to naïve newlyweds. These weaknesses call for adjustments to be made in the relationship. Not only that, young couples will have to learn to *live* with their partner's weaknesses.

That's why it's so important for married couples to have the Holy Spirit's help so that they might be *gentle, patient, kind, and self-controlled* while adjusting to this new calculus. Fortunately for us, the Holy Spirit helps turn weaknesses into positive attributes. Galatians 5:22-23 points out nine characteristics available for Spirit-filled Christians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's quite a laundry list.

Spirit-filled Christians attain more enjoyment in their marriage because they seek the Holy Spirit's help to overcome their weaknesses, which helps them become less objectionable to their partner. In addition, the Holy Spirit gives them grace to overlook and joyously live with their partner's weaknesses.

Personality Conflicts

Personality conflicts are, in reality, differing weaknesses that could be called *temperament conflicts*. They are weaknesses in one partner that irritate the weaknesses in the other. Here are some examples I have encountered in counseling.

Mr. Sanguine's carelessness and unfinished projects create a great conflict with his wife's melancholy, perfectionist, and faithful tendencies. When he comes home from a sales meeting at

8:00 P.M., hours after his wife's home-baked lasagna came out of the oven at 5:45 P.M., she will have a hard time "forgiving and forgetting" his thoughtlessness, because he didn't even pick up his cell phone to say he'd be late.

Mr. Choleric devotes his active mind to the business of making a living, and his wife feels neglected. She doesn't realize that before marriage she was his "project" and that he pursued and pursued until she agreed to marry him. Now that he can cross off "get married" from his to-do list, he rushes off to the next step in his master plan, which is to buy their first house and move out of their dumpy apartment. He works long hours to get ahead and make more money, but when he comes home, all he can do is express irritation at their messy surroundings. Instead, he should realize that his wife is employed outside the home as well and is often too tired to keep the apartment neat as a pin. His cruel, sarcastic words feel like a lash against her back.

Now let's take a look at Mrs. Melancholy, who seems to have permanent PMS—at least that is what her new husband thinks. She's been in a black mood ever since the jet landed at home following the Hawaiian honeymoon. Perhaps she experienced a natural letdown after the tense, excited anticipation of her wedding, but she is not sure. All she knows is her husband seems impatient and frustrated with her, which causes the young bride to lapse into periods of silence and crying jags. *He doesn't love me anymore*, she thinks. She focuses her perfectionist tendencies on creating a flawlessly kept house, but that turns out to be counterproductive when her husband feels as though he can't relax in his own home. She chides him for putting his bare feet on the coffee table or for not tossing his socks into the clothes hamper. Her mounting frustrations stay bottled up, where they will ultimately explode and cause a major argument.

Mrs. Phlegmatic's lack of motivation becomes a drain on her husband. Although she has an exciting career as a buyer for a department store chain, she prefers to cocoon at home when not at the office. Her husband feels as if he's married the most boring person on earth. He begs and pleads for her to do something with him—like take out their mountain bikes for a ride. He says to himself, *It's just so hard for her to get going on a Saturday morning.* Her quiet stubbornness has created great resentment and frustration in her husband's heart.

Manage Your Conflicts

Differences between partners need not be fatal! No disagreement is a threat to a marriage; it's what a couple does about those disagreements that determines the success or failure of a marriage. The following suggestions are given to help you make the right kind of adjustments.

- * **When you feel frustration, resentment, or some other form of hostility, stop and take an objective look at what's causing it.**
- * **Pray about it.** Ask God to give you a peace that does not depend upon your partner's behavior. After facing your inner hostility and realizing that anger is a sin, confess it (1 John 1:9) and ask God to fill you with his Spirit (Luke 11:13). Then you will be able to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, NKJV).
- * **Next, pray about your partner's actions, asking God to help your spouse see his or her shortcomings and to lead you in discussing the matter with him.**
- * **Communicate with your partner about what you perceive as his or her faults. This should always be done *in love*** (Ephesians 4:15). Pick a relaxed time when you can objectively

share your feelings without getting overly emotional. This is usually best accomplished when you go out to dinner. Never raise your voice in anger, and always allow time for her to think about what you've said. Then leave the matter up to the Holy Spirit.

- * **Ask God, the giver of love, to fill you with so much love for your spouse that you can genuinely love your partner despite his or her weaknesses.** Look at his strengths and thank God for them (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- * **Forget past mistakes!** "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" (Philippians 3:13-14).

If you repeatedly follow this procedure, you will find that the Holy Spirit will lead your reaction to your partner's actions. Your love will increase so much that, like a thick coat of oil-based paint, it will cover a multitude of weaknesses.