

“THE FOUR HUMAN TEMPERAMENTS”

by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

There are “reasons” for everything we do as human beings, though it is often difficult for us to understand why we think like we think, feel like we feel, or act like we act in life. Many of the answers for human behavior can be found in people’s temperaments or personalities.

The study of the human personality goes all the way back to the famous Greek physician **Hippocrates** (460-370 BC), the “father of medicine” — he was born during the prophetic ministries of Nehemiah and Malachi, or some 450 years before the birth of Christ. Hippocrates’ work has been researched extensively and is used as a dynamic diagnostic tool in both psychology and psychiatry to this day.

A generic explanation of human “Temperaments” or “Personalities” is that all of us have been born with genetically inherited “behavioral tendencies” that are as much a part of our DNA as is the color of our hair; all of us are made up of DNA combinations passed on to us through our parents and ancestors. This fact is important because it helps us to more fully understand our basic behavioral disposition. Even though much of our human personality is inherited, it should also be noted, much of it has also been influenced and shaped by our unique environments. Most scientific research on human behavior suggests that about 50% of the variations in human personality are determined by genetic factors — so our human behavior is shaped equally by our environment and by our DNA. Thus, all of us as human beings have been hard-wired by our Creator (we are not just products of random chance — Psalms 119:73; 139:13-16; Is 44:24), and we have all been impacted by the world around us. Furthermore, according to the scientific analysis all human personalities are commonly divided up into four major categories (with the exception of those with severe mental disorders), and these four types are further broken down into two categories, namely Extroverts and Introverts.

Extroverted Personalities: The Choleric and Sanguine personality types are more “out-going,” more sociable, and more comfortable in a crowd, even standing out in a crowd.

Introverted Personalities: The Melancholic and Phlegmatic personality types are more shy and “reserved” and feel anxious about being in crowd, especially at being singled out in a crowd.

It should be noted that all human beings have a degree of each of these four personality types within them, though each person will definitely test out higher in one, with another being a close second. No individual only possesses one personality type, and most of us have a very strong secondary temperament. Should you take one of the personality tests available today, you would discover that you possess dominant characteristics in a couple of the temperaments, and each kind of personality has a general characteristic associated with it. It should be noted that there are varying degrees of **Extroversion** and **Introversion** — in other words, some Phlegmatics and Melancholics “border” on being outgoing, and some Choleric and Sanguines “border” on being shy.

Though the characteristics may not be true for everyone with a particular personality, they are generally true for the vast majority of people. All four personality types have generally

accepted strengths and weaknesses with which people must contend, and no one personality type is better than any other. It is very important to understand that each temperament has characteristics, which are generally considered to be “strengths” as well as characteristics which are generally considered to be “weaknesses”. However, whether any characteristic is in fact a strength or a weakness, will depend on the circumstances. For example: Confidence is a typical characteristic of the Choleric temperament and is generally considered to be a strength. However, when considering to become a commercial aeroplane pilot, the confidence of a Choleric temperament is in fact a weakness, because when encountering bad weather, a Choleric person, will most likely not be afraid to fly in the face of danger, thereby putting the plane and the crew at risk. In contrast, the submissive and humble nature of a Melancholic temperament, are typically considered to be weaknesses. However, for commercial aeroplane pilots, being submissive and humble, are considered their greatest strengths, because such pilots will tend to follow instructions from an Air Traffic Controller to avoid bad weather.

Whatever your temperament or personality, God is the one who has given you the abilities and sensitivities that you possess, and He has given those things to you for a purpose — that you might faithfully work at developing them and using them in His service, serving people and to make the world a better place.

Though our temperaments have also been tainted by sin and the fall, God’s Spirit is mightily at work in us transforming us into the image of Christ that we might be more effective workmen in His Kingdom (John 17:17-20; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:20; Ephesians 4:7-16; Philippians 2:13).

Remember, no two people are alike — we are all unique — and we have all been given a unique calling in life. Therefore it is important that we not covet qualities we do not possess; rather, that we focus on discovering God’s will for our lives and enjoy serving Him with the skill-set with which we have been blessed; knowing that God wants to use us to do the work for which He designed us. So identify your skills and strengths and get to work! (Prayerfully reflect upon the following passages — Matthew 6:33; 13:12; 25:14-30; Luke 12:48; John 21:20-22; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 12:4-7, 21-24; Ephesians 2:10).

Of all the relationships we have in life, marriage is by far the most important. A good relationship between a husband and a wife makes for a happy home. A marriage shadowed by bitterness, fighting and other unpleasantness leaves its scars on not only the couple, but also on their children and those around them. Good marriages are not just accidents — they are the result of hard work and understanding. In general, marriages between two people with the *“same personality type”* have the greatest potential for clashing, and anyone married to a sanguine or choleric is in for a challenge; this is mainly due to the tendencies of these two personality types to require excessive attention and control, respectively. Thus pretty much all marriages will have fairly significant challenges. Most often *“opposites do attract”* — Sanguine individuals tend to marry Melancholics, and Cholerics favor Phlegmatics; though such situations are not always the case, they do appear to be the most common. It should be noted that there is no such thing as *“the ideal combination;”* we are all fallen human beings with foibles and shortcomings.

Following is a brief description of each of the four temperaments or personalities — at the end of each description I have listed the *two primary characteristics* for that temperament. By identifying the two temperaments that best describe who you are as a person, you should be able to identify your “strongest characteristic” — be it predominantly extroversion, introversion, organizational, or relational.

Aside from the **Extrovert-Introvert** continuum that was described above on the previous page, there is the **Organizational-Relational** continuum — Cholerics and Melancholics are more “organizational,” whereas the Sanguines and Phlegmatics are more “relational.”

With that said, let’s look at a description of each of the four temperaments.

1) SANGUINE — The Sanguine temperament is fundamentally *impulsive* and *pleasure-seeking*. Sanguine’s are frequently referred to as “**the talker**.” They are expressive in personality... desire influence, and being enthusiastic with people... in expressing thoughts with excitement... and being the center of attention. The Sanguine is sociable and charismatic, generally warm-hearted, pleasant, lively, optimistic, creative, compassionate, and outgoing; he is the life of the party, humorous, enthusiastic, and cheerful; he easily attracts others and makes friends; he inspires others to work and join in the fun. He is sincere at heart, always a child, creative and colorful, possesses energy and enthusiasm, loves people, is a great volunteer, thrives on compliments, and doesn’t hold grudges. The Sanguine likes to talk a lot... struggles with completing tasks... is chronically late... and tends to forget his obligations... he bases his decisions primarily on feelings. Sanguine types can be great parents, because they love to have fun; but their homes are often frenzied and disorganized, and the only time you find everyone silent is when they are sleeping! Sanguine people usually possess high amounts of energy, so they often seem restless and spontaneous. This type of personality loves the life of luxury and impressing others... they are big spenders... they love to travel the world and indulge in rich, comfortable living... and they will do almost anything to satisfy their always present need to be absorbed by something meaningful and exciting. They are impulsive and often find it difficult to control their cravings; as such, people with this temperament are more susceptible to smoking, alcohol, drugs, gambling and taking risk; sadly, they are most susceptible to chemical imbalances, addictions and mood disorders. These people feel bored if they are not absorbed by something intriguing and adventurous. The Sanguine is very poor at tolerating boredom; for the most part he will try to avoid monotony and that which is routine at all costs; routine jobs and boring companions annoy him and irritate him.

The Bible characters that seem to best fit the characteristics of a Sanguine are King David and Peter. In addition to the characteristics listed below, the Sanguine is essentially described as being *relational* and an *extrovert*...

- Is self-composed, seldom shows signs of embarrassment, perhaps forward or bold.
- Is eager to express himself before a group; likes to be heard.
- Prefers group activities; work or play; not easily satisfied with individual projects.
- Is not insistent upon acceptance of his ideas or plans; compliant and yielding.
- Is good in details; prefers activities requiring pep and energy.
- Is impetuous and impulsive; his decisions are often (usually) wrong.
- Is keenly alive to environment, physical and social; likes curiosity.
- Tends to take success for granted; is a follower; lacks initiative.
- Is hearty and cordial, even to strangers; forms acquaintanceship easily.
- Tends to elation of spirit; not given to worry and anxiety; is carefree.
- Seeks wide and broad range of friendships; is not selective; not exclusive in games.
- Is quick and decisive in movements; pronounced or excessive energy output.
- Turns from one activity to another in rapid succession; little perseverance.
- Makes adjustments easily; welcomes changes; makes the best appearance possible.
- Is frank, talkative, sociable, expresses emotions readily; does not stand on ceremony.

- Has frequent fluctuations of mood; tends to frequent alterations of elation and depression.

2) CHOLERIC — The Choleric temperament is fundamentally *ambitious* and *leader-like*. The Choleric is the strongest of the extroverted Temperaments, and is sometimes referred to as a “Type A” personality or “*the doer*” (or “the driver”); he is a hard driving individual known for accomplishing goals... he has a lot of aggression, energy, and/or passion, and tries to instill it in others. Dominant in personality Cholerics desire control, and are best at jobs that demand strong control and authority, and require quick decisions and instant attention. The Choleric is the most insensitive of the Temperaments; they care little for the feelings of others; feelings simply don’t play into the equation for them. Most Cholerics are men, and born leaders who exude confidence; they are naturally gifted businessmen, strong willed, independent, self sufficient, they see the whole picture, organize well, insist on production, stimulate activity, thrive on opposition, are unemotional and not easily discouraged. They are decisive, must correct wrongs when they see them, and compulsively need to change things. They systematize everything, are all about independence, and do not do well in a subordinate position. They are goal oriented and have a wonderful focus as they work; they are good at math and engineering, are analytical, logical and pragmatic; and are masters at figuring things out. They are skeptical and do not trust easy; they need to investigate the facts on their own, relying on their own logic and reasoning. If they are absorbed in something, do not even bother trying to get their attention. Negatively, they are bossy, domineering, impatient, can’t relax, quick tempered, easily angered, unsympathetic, enjoy arguments, too impetuous, and can dominate people of other temperaments, especially the Phlegmatic types. Many great charismatic military and political figures were Cholerics. They like to be in charge of everything... they are workaholics who thrive on control and want their way... they are highly independent people, and have very little respect for diplomas and other credentials. They set high standards, are diligent and hard-working, are rarely satisfied, and never give up their attempts to succeed. Choleric women are very rare, but strangely are very popular people. Cholerics have the most trouble with anger, intolerance and impatience; they want facts instead of emotions; and should you get your feelings hurt, it’s your problem, not theirs. The Choleric does not have many friends (though he needs them), and he has a tendency to fall into deep sudden depression, and is much prone to mood swings.

The Bible characters that seem to best fit the characteristics of a Choleric are the apostle Paul, James, Martha and Titus. In addition to the characteristics listed below, the Choleric is essentially described as being *organizational* and an *extrovert*...

- Is self-composed; seldom shows embarrassment, is forward or bold.
- Is eager to express himself before a group if he has some purpose in view.
- Is insistent upon the acceptance of his ideas or plans; argumentative and persuasive.
- Is impetuous & impulsive; plunges into situations where forethought would have deterred him.
- Is self-confident and self-reliant; tends to take success for granted.
- Exhibits strong initiative; tends to elation of spirit; seldom gloomy; prefers to lead.
- Is very sensitive and easily hurt; reacts strongly to praise or blame.
- Is not given to worry or anxiety; he is seclusive.
- Is quick and decisive in movement; pronounced or excessive energy output.
- Has marked tendency to persevere; does not abandon something readily regardless of success.
- Is characterized by emotions not freely or spontaneously expressed, except anger.
- Makes best appearance possible; perhaps conceited; may use hypocrisy, deceit, disguise.

3) PHLEGMATIC — The Phlegmatic temperament is fundamentally relaxed and quiet, ranging from warmly attentive to lazily sluggish. Phlegmatics are referred to as “the watcher” — they are best in positions of unity and mediation, and solid in positions that desire steadiness. The Phlegmatic is most often a female who tends to be easygoing, content with herself, calm, cool and collected, tolerant of others, well-balanced, sympathetic, kind, unassuming, keeps emotions hidden, is happily reconciled to life, not in a hurry, has many friends, avoids conflict, inoffensive, quiet but witty, agreeable and intuitive... though they are very peaceful, patient and adaptable, they tend to be reluctant, indecisive and a worrier. They are wonderful at gathering facts, classifying them, and seeing the relationship between them; basically, they are good at generalizing, seeing the bigger picture, and reading between the lines. They are accepting, affectionate, frequently shy, and often prefer stability to uncertainty and change. Because they are fearful, indecisive and hesitant of things in life, they have a compromising nature. Phlegmatics often worry about everything. They want to know other people’s deepest feelings and strive to build intimate attachments with just about everyone in their lives. They are interested in cooperation and interpersonal harmony, and this is why they preserve their family ties and friendships. They could be described as considerate, charitable, sympathetic, trusting, warm, calm, relaxed, consistent, rational, curious, and observant — this makes them good administrators. Phlegmatic men and women strive for greater self-knowledge, and seek to contribute to society at large. On the negative side, they are often selfish, self-righteous, judge others easily, resist change, stay uninvolved, dampen enthusiasm, and can be passive-aggressive. In large part, the Phlegmatic temperament is deemed to be a neutral temperament.

The Bible characters that seem to best fit the characteristics of a Phlegmatic are Joseph, Timothy and Barnabas. In addition to the following characteristics, the Phlegmatic is essentially described as being relational and an introvert...

- Is deliberative; slow in making decisions; perhaps overcautious in minor matters.
- Is indifferent to external affairs.
- Is reserved and distant.
- Is slow in movement.
- Has a marked tendency to persevere.
- Exhibits a constancy of mood.

4) MELANCHOLIC — The Melancholic temperament is fundamentally introverted & thoughtful. Melancholics are often referred to as “the thinker.” Their analytical personality’s desire caution and restraint, best at attending to details and in analyzing problems too difficult for others. They tend to be deep-thinkers and feelers who often see the negative attributes of life, rather than the good and positive things. They are self-reliant and independent and get wholly involved in what they are doing. Melancholics can be highly creative in activities such as art, literature, music, health care and ministry, and can become preoccupied with the tragedy and cruelty in the world; they long to make a significant and lasting difference in the world. Melancholics usually have a high degree of perfectionist tendencies, especially in regards to their own lives or performance. They are serious, purposeful, analytical, musical, artistic, talented, creative, self-sacrificing, conscientious, idealistic, philosophical, and are genius prone. They are also very “introspective” and hold themselves to a very high standard — one that can rarely be achieved. They tend to be highly organized, schedule oriented, economical, tidy, neat, detail conscious, finish what they start, like charts, graphs, figures and lists, see the problems and are able to identify creative solutions with ease. Sadly, many Melancholics are also victims of deep bouts of depression that come from great dissatisfaction,

disappointment, hurtful words or events. Melancholic personalities are people who have a deep love for others, while usually holding themselves in contempt. In short, melancholics take life very seriously (too much so sometimes) and it often leaves them feeling blue, helpless or even hopeless. Because they are deeply caring people, they make great doctors, nurses, social workers, ministers, and teachers. This comes from a deep sense of what others are feeling or experiencing and the inward need to reach out and do something in order to help them. They are extremely loyal in friendships; there is an old saying that goes like this: "If you have a Melancholic for a friend, you have a friend for life." Most Melancholics have a low self-image, are inclined toward depression, think "self-promotion" is tacky, are continually into "fixing themselves," are notoriously "guilty" (they have an over-active conscious), and tend to worry much too often about their health.

The Bible characters that seem to best fit the characteristics of a Melancholic are Moses and Abraham. In addition to the following characteristics listed below, the Melancholic is essentially described as being *organizational* and an *introvert*...

- Is self-conscious, easily embarrassed, timid, bashful.
- Avoids talking before a group; when obliged to he finds it difficult.
- Prefers to work and play alone. Good in details; careful.
- Is deliberative; slow in making decisions; perhaps overcautious even in minor matters.
- Is lacking in self-confidence and initiative; compliant and yielding.
- Tends to detachment from environment; reserved and distant except to intimate friends.
- Tends to depression; frequently moody or gloomy; very sensitive; easily hurt.
- Does not form acquaintances readily; prefers narrow range of friends; somewhat exclusionary.
- Worries over possible misfortune; crosses bridges before coming to them.
- Is secretive; seclusive; shut in; not inclined to speak unless spoken to.
- Is slow in movement; deliberative or perhaps indecisive; moods frequent and constant.
- Often represents himself at a disadvantage; modest and unassuming.

Closing note to this section: The biblical characters listed above — Joseph, Timothy, Barnabas, David, Peter, Paul, James, Titus, Martha, Moses, and Abraham — obviously possessed temperaments other than the one attributed to them. These individuals were chosen because of the behavioral tendencies they demonstrated at various times in biblical history.

THE VARIOUS "TEMPERAMENT COMBINATIONS"

Following are the various temperament combinations and what they look like when they are combined together. Once you have identified your "*primary temperament*" and the temperament that is a close second for you, you are then ready to see how the two temperaments look when joined together. When looking at the various temperament options below, your "*primary temperament*" will be listed first — for example, if your primary temperament is a Sanguine and your runner-up temperament is a Choleric, they would be listed as "**San/Chol**" under the heading "Sanguine," not as "**Chol/San**" under the heading "Choleric" (your secondary temperament); your primary temperament needs to be listed first. The corresponding results of the combinations listed can be found on the following website if interested: <http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Warfield2.html>

SANGUINE

San/Chol – This is the strongest “extrovert” of all the blends because both primary types are extroverted. They are people-oriented and enthusiastic but with the resolutions of the Choleric tempering the lack of organization of the Sanguine. He is almost always a sports enthusiast and is ideal in sales. He can talk too much and can be obnoxious if threatened. The forgetfulness of the Sanguine and the caustic nature of the Choleric may make them hurtful without realizing it.

San/Mel – They are highly emotional people whose moods can fluctuate from highs to lows and back again quickly. The Sanguine’s outgoing nature often allows the Melancholic's critical nature to surface too easily. It is very easy for a San/Mel to "get down" on themselves, and to realize their potential, it is best that they work with others.

San/Phleg – The overpowering outgoing nature of the Sanguine is tempered by the gracious Phlegmatic. These are extremely happy and carefree individuals who live to help people. They would not purposely hurt anyone but they must fight a lack of workplace motivation; they would rather visit than work.

CHOLERIC

Chol/San – The second strongest extrovert is an active and purposeful individual; he is almost fearless and has high levels of energy. Whatever his profession, his brain is always active and engaged. His weaknesses combine the quick anger of the Sanguine with the resentment of the Choleric. He gets AND gives ulcers. He may leave people (including spouse and children) shell-shocked and resentful because of his angry outbursts.

Chol/Mel – The Choleric/Melancholic is very industrious and capable. He is both Industrious and detailed. He combines verbal aggressiveness with sharp attention to detail. He is very competitive and forceful. He can be autocratic and opinionated with work habits that keep after details until the job is completely finished. He finds interpersonal relationships difficult due to the hard-to-please nature of the Choleric and the perfectionistic nature of the Melancholic.

Chol/Phleg – This is the most subdued of the outgoing temperaments. He is extremely capable in the long run though he may not impress you that way at first. He is organized and a good planner. He often gets more accomplished than other temperaments because he always thinks in terms of enlisting others to help him. His weaknesses include a tendency to quietly harbor bitterness rather than letting it out. Acknowledging weaknesses is difficult for him and he tends to worry about his performance in life activities.

PHLEGMATIC

Phleg/San – This is the easiest to get along with being congenial, happy, and people-oriented.

They make excellent administrators and other jobs that involve getting along with people. He may lack motivation and discipline and may fall short of his true capabilities. He may "putter around" for years without making progress.

Phleg/Chol – This is the most active of the introverts but he'll never be a ball of fire. He can be an excellent counselor because he is an active listener. He is practical and helpful and patient. He may lack motivation and may become stubborn if threatened. He may also have a tendency toward being sedentary and passive. He needs to be around other people as he is externally motivated.

Phleg/Mel – This is gracious and quiet, does the proper thing and is dependable. He wobbles between patience and criticism and may tend toward negativism. They can be afraid of overextending themselves so may avoid involvement in a group.

MELANCHOLIC

Mel/San – They are detailed and organized; the Melancholic is tempered by the outgoing and warm Sanguine. He makes an excellent teacher as his organized side is well versed in the facts and his Sanguine side makes him enjoyable to listen to. If he goes into sales it will be sales that calls for exacting detail and the presentation of many facts. He is an emotional person – from being moved to tears to being critical and hard on others. Both temperaments can be fearful which may make this an insecure person with a poor self image.

Mel/Chol – This is both a perfectionist and a driver which may lead him into law or medicine. They mix decisiveness and determination. Because of the critical nature of the Melancholic they may be very difficult to please. If they become negative about someone or something it will have a tendency to stay with them for a long time. Their combination can lead them to "nitpick" others and be revengeful to those they have a grudge against.

Mel/Phleg – These are often teachers and scholars. They are not as prone to hostility as other

Melancholic blends and combine analysis with organization. They make excellent accountants and bookkeepers. Unfortunately he can become easily discouraged and may be susceptible to fear and anxiety. They may become uncooperative because of stubborn, rigid tendencies.