

WHO DID YOU REALLY MARRY?

Love Languages, Personality Types, Communication

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
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Essentials of Marriage: Who Did You Really Marry?
Participant's Guide

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QUICK START GUIDE FOR COUPLES

Whether you're studying in a group, as a couple, or individually, this book is for you. It's packed with discussion questions, advice, biblical input, and application activities.

But maybe all you'd like to do right now is watch the accompanying DVD and talk about it with your spouse. If so, go directly to the "Catching the Vision" section of each chapter. There you'll find the discussion questions you're looking for.

When you have more time, we encourage you to explore the other features in this book. We think you'll find them . . . essential!

For even more help with your relationship, go to
focusonthefamily.com/marriage.

WELCOME!

If there's anything you don't need, it's one more thing to do.

Unless, of course, that one thing might make the *other* things a whole lot easier.

We can't guarantee that this course will take all the challenge out of your marriage. It won't keep you from forgetting your anniversary, thaw all the icy silences, or make your spouse alphabetize the shoes in your closet.

But it *will* help you understand why you're married, how to stay that way, and how to enjoy it to the fullest. That's because you'll learn the essentials—what's vital to a healthy relationship, keys to working out your differences, and what God considers most important in “holy matrimony.”

In other words, you'll discover how to be the husband or wife you really want to be.

That takes effort, but it doesn't take boredom or busy work. So we've designed this course to be provocative and practical. At its heart is an entertaining, down-to-earth video series featuring many of today's most popular marriage experts. And in your hands is the book that's going to make it all personal for you—the Participant's Guide.

In each chapter of this book, you'll find the following sections:

Finding Yourself. Take this survey to figure out where you stand on the subject at hand.

Catching the Vision. Use this section as you watch and think about the DVD.

Digging Deeper. This Bible study includes Scripture passages and thought-provoking questions.

Making It Work. Practice makes perfect, so here's your chance to begin applying principles from the DVD to your own marriage.

Bringing It Home. To wrap up, a licensed counselor affiliated with Focus on the Family offers encouraging advice you can use this week.

Whether you're using this book as part of a group or on your own, taking a few minutes to read and complete each chapter will bring the messages of the DVD home.

And isn't that exactly where you and your spouse need it most?

Note: Many issues addressed in this series are difficult ones. Some couples may need to address them in greater detail and depth. The DVD presentations and this guide are intended as general advice only, and not to replace clinical counseling, medical treatment, legal counsel, or financial guidance.

Focus on the Family maintains a referral network of Christian counselors. For information, call 1-800-A-FAMILY and ask for the counseling department. You can also download free, printable brochures offering help for couples at <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/articles/brochures.aspx>.



Chapter 1

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

“When she’s stressed out, she talks all the time. If I get tired of talking to her after an hour or so, she gets a second wind and calls a friend!”

“He’s so sensitive. I can’t correct him without it making him angry. No matter what I say, he takes it wrong.”

“After we leave a social event, I get so angry I can’t see straight. She embarrasses me—not once, but throughout the evening.”

If these statements hit home, you’re not alone. Most of us have said—or at least thought—similar things about our spouses.

Couples often tell therapists that one of their toughest challenges is adjusting to a spouse’s personality. Many of those people are ready to give up and resign themselves to a miserable state of existence. Others fear their situations will worsen to a point where the spouse’s personality turns repulsive—and divorce will be inevitable.

So what do you do? Stay miserable? Get angry and resentful? Leave? We suggest none of the above.

—Mitch Temple
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist¹

FINDING YOURSELF

Identifying Your Needs

This survey will help you think about how you're already handling the issues discussed in this session.

1. If you and your spouse were musical instruments, what kind would you be? Why?
 - handbells in a choir
 - dueling banjos
 - an electric guitar and an acoustic guitar
 - a gloomy oboe and a perky flute
 - a loud trombone and a muted trumpet
 - other _____
2. When it comes to marriage, which of the following sayings do you agree with? Why?
 - "Opposites attract."
 - "It takes all kinds."
 - "Birds of a feather flock together."
 - "It takes one to know one."
 - "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus."
3. Which of the following ideas do you think are false? Why?
 - God has one person picked out for you.
 - You need to find your soul mate.
 - Some personality types are incompatible.
 - It's a good idea to understand your spouse's personality type.
 - Generally speaking, gender determines personality type.
 - If you married the "wrong" type, you'll be miserable.

4. Did you and your spouse take a personality test before marriage? If not, why not? If so, what effect did it have? _____

5. Would you say that your parents were the right “type” for each other? Why or why not? _____

6. What does it mean to say that spouses are “perfect for each other”? Does this describe any couples you know? _____



Watching and Discussing the DVD

“It takes all kinds.” But when two very different kinds find themselves in the same marriage, the results aren’t always pretty. Often the contrasts that attracted couples end up repelling them.

In this DVD segment, bestselling author and counselor Dr. John Trent looks at the differences between spouses—and how concentrating on strengths can make those differences assets instead of liabilities. Host and counselor Dr. Greg Smalley adds a story from his own family, too.

You’ll have fun deciding what types you and your spouse are, and how to make the most of it.

After viewing the DVD, use questions like these to help you think through what you saw and heard.

1. What do spouses usually mean when they say the following? Do you think these sayings are facts, half-truths, romantic notions, or myths? Why?

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- “Opposites attract.”
 - “You complete me.”
 - “She’s my better half.”
 - “He’s everything I’m not.”
 - “I don’t know what I’d do without her.”
2. According to Dr. John Trent, what are the four personality types? If you were to express them not as animals but as different kinds of cars, what would they be?
 3. Which of the following “personality pairs” do you think would get along better? Why?
 - lion and lion
 - lion and golden retriever
 - otter and otter
 - otter and beaver
 4. Let’s say a couple has to decide whether to move 1,000 miles away so that the husband can take a new job with more pay and bigger challenges. All the wife’s friends are in the current location, and neither spouse knows anyone in the new place. How might each of the following personality combinations approach the question, and what do you think each couple would decide? Why?
 - otter wife and beaver husband
 - lion husband and golden retriever wife
 - two golden retrievers
 - two otters
 5. John Trent points out that lions tend to approach problems aggressively; golden retrievers tend to step away from problems. How could spouses with these personalities serve as “checks and balances” on each other in the following situations?

- The couple's 12-year-old son is on a soccer team, but the coach hardly ever lets him play.
 - The couple's 10-year-old daughter won't practice her piano playing between lessons.
 - The couple's 14-year-old cat will die without a \$7,500 operation.
 - The "golden retriever's" widowed 80-year-old mother is no longer able to take care of herself.
6. How would you describe your personality type and that of your spouse? What conflicts do you think John Trent would expect you to have? Do you actually tend to have them? If not, why not?
7. How have personality differences between you and your spouse played a positive role in your marriage? If your spouse suddenly swapped personalities with someone else, what would you miss most about those differences?



Bible Study

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

1. Are you more like Mary or Martha? Is your spouse more like Martha or Mary? If the two of you have differences in this area, has it caused conflict?
2. Did Jesus imply that Mary's personality was superior, or that she'd made a better choice? How can a spouse's choices make a bigger difference than personality type?

When the time came for [Rebekah] to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:24-34)

3. How would you describe the personalities of Jacob and Esau? How might spouses with those personalities interact?

4. Isaac and Rebekah each preferred one son over the other. What happens when spouses prefer their own personalities and wish their mates were more like themselves?

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (1 Corinthians 12:27–13:10)

5. According to this passage, how can people with different strengths work together?
6. Do you believe that love can overcome personality differences in a marriage? Why or why not?

MAKING IT WORK

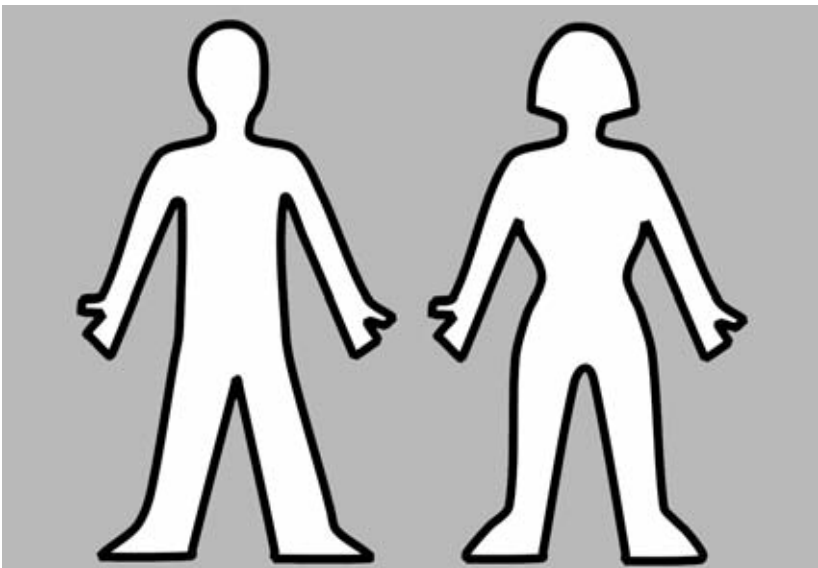
Applying the Principles

John Trent says that understanding our strengths helps us see why our spouse is so valuable; that helps us blend differences and become a close-knit team.

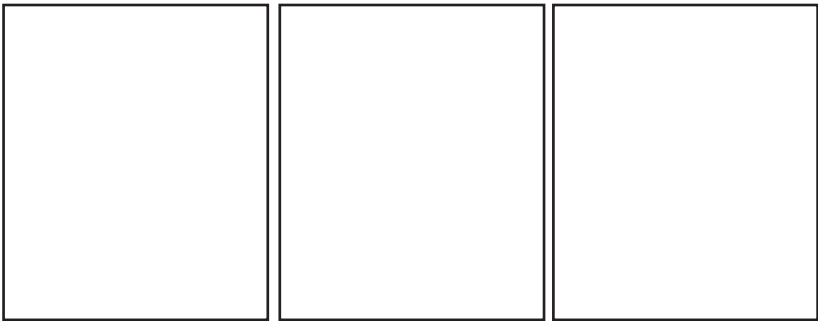
To help you start thinking about your strengths and how they might complement each other, here's a fun exercise. Try seeing yourself and your spouse as superheroes. What would your "powers" be? List them here.

What would your names be? (Examples: Intuitive Girl; The Human Calculator)

What would your costumes look like? Draw them on the figures below.



How could your powers complement each other as you faced a threat? Let's say the two of you face a supervillain called The Budget Buster. How could you work as a team to overcome him? Draw your idea in the "comic strip" below.



How could seeing yourselves as this kind of team affect the way you get along? How could you use that kind of cooperation and finding strength in differences to overcome challenges you're currently facing?

Here are two ways you can continue to follow up on this session. This week, rent a movie featuring a man and woman with very different personalities. Some possibilities: *Romancing the Stone*, *The King and I*, and *The Music Man*. Spend some time talking about the characters' contrasts, conflicts, and "chemistry." How do you think a relationship between them would have worked out over the long term? How could your own differences be part of the "adventure" of marriage?

If you'd like to find out more about your personality types, see *The Two Sides of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent, Ph.D. (Tyndale, 1990). To take a test from that book, go to <http://listen.family.org/images/PersonalStrengthsSurvey.pdf>.



Encouragement from a Counselor

Consider these facts about differences in personalities.

1. *God created us to be different.* He knew there would be a place in His plan for introverts and extroverts, for thinkers and feelers, for those who are planners and those who are spontaneous. He created some people to be dreamers and some to be content with things as they are. “Different” doesn’t automatically equal “wrong.”

Proverbs 22:6 can be translated to recommend training a child “according to his bent.” In other words, it’s good to discover a child’s distinctive personality and bring her up in a way that compliments her personality instead of tearing it down. Why not apply this idea to marriages, too? Are you willing to allow your spouse the same freedom to be unique—and not the same as you?

2. *It’s easier to spot a flaw than to see a strength.* Jesus put it in terms of spying a speck in another’s eye versus seeing a log in our own (Matthew 7:3-5).

When you were dating, you probably found it easy to focus on the admirable traits of your future mate. You seemed to like the same things, enjoyed the same conversational topics, and tended to overlook each other’s quirks.

Bennett, for instance, married Deb because she was such a “great communicator.” Now he’s annoyed because she’s such a “great agitator.” Dana married Marcus because he was such a “confident, strong manager.” Now he’s an “overconfident jerk.”

3. *Your ability to tolerate your mate’s personality changes with time.* Most of us can stand negative behavior for a while. But everyone has a limit!

Belinda, for example, could put up with Jeff’s ability to make a joke out of everything—for about a year. After she became the brunt of his

jokes, her level of tolerance changed. She reached a point where she despised his voice, especially his laughter.

Is that the case with you? Maybe it's not that your spouse's personality has become more of a problem; it may be that your ability to value or overlook some attributes has diminished.

Reaching your limit is no excuse for giving up on a marriage, though. Sometimes it's enough to realize that the change is in your "irritation threshold" and adjust that gauge accordingly. At other times, you may need help from a counselor to express your frustration and find a healthy tolerance level.

4. *Sometimes it's not really about personality.* Could it be that your mate has done something that deeply hurt you—and his personality has become the contention point?

That was the case with Barry. He'd always liked the fact that his wife, Wendy, was sociable and outgoing. But then he discovered that she'd been flirting with a coworker. Now Barry viewed her personality as a threat.

When your spouse hurts you, it tends to change the way you think and feel toward him or her. You suddenly see that person through tinted lenses, not clear ones.

If this is the case with you, healing has to occur before everyday personality issues can be objectively dealt with. Identify the real issue. Work on it—with the help of a counselor if needed. Commit to overcoming your tendency to focus on the negative aspects of your spouse's personality.

Your mate's personality may be different and sometimes difficult to manage. But God doesn't want this to allow division in your marriage.

One of Paul's points to the Corinthians might be summarized this way: "Learn to accept and adjust to each other, no matter what people look like or act like." That applies to husbands and wives, too.

—Mitch Temple
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist²

NOTES

1. Adapted from Mitch Temple, “How Can I Adjust to My Spouse’s Personality?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), p. 31.
2. Ibid, pp. 31-33.
3. Adapted from James Groesbeck with Amy Swierczek, “How Can We Make Time to Talk?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, p. 206.
4. Ibid, pp. 206-208.
5. Adapted from Rob Jackson, “How Should We Talk About Sensitive Issues?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, p. 212.
6. Ibid, pp. 212-215.
7. Adapted from Romie Hurley, “What If We Have a Lot of Unresolved Conflicts?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, p. 258.
8. Ibid, pp. 258-259.
9. Adapted from James Groesbeck with Amy Swierczek, “How Do Other Couples Handle Conflict?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, p. 229.
10. Ibid, pp. 229-232.
11. Adapted from Phillip J. Swihart, “Why Don’t We Speak the Same Language?” in *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage*, pp. 199-200.
12. Ibid, pp. 199-201.