

Meet The Four Basic Temperaments

More than 400 years before Christ, Hippocrates, the brilliant Greek physician and philosopher, propounded the theory that there are basically four types of temperament. He erroneously thought that these four temperament types were the result of the four body liquids that predominated in the human body: "blood"; "choler" or "yellow bile"; "melancholy" or "black bile"; and "phlegm." Hippocrates gave names to the temperaments that were suggested by the liquids he thought were the cause; the Sanguine—blood, Choleric—yellow bile, Melancholy—black bile, and Phlegmatic—phlegm. To him, these suggested the lively, active, black, and slow temperaments.

The idea that temperament is determined by body liquid has long been discarded, but strangely enough, the four-fold classification of temperaments is still widely used. Modern psychology has given many new suggestions for classification of temperaments, but none has found more acceptance than those of ancient Hippocrates. Perhaps the best known of the new classifications is the two-fold separation of "extrovert" and "introvert." These two do not provide sufficient separation for our purposes. We, therefore, shall present the four-fold temperament descriptions of Hippocrates.

The reader should bear in mind that the four-fold temperaments are basic temperaments. *No person is a single-temperament type.* We have four grandparents, all of whom make some contribution through the genes to our temperament. They may all have been of different temperaments, therefore all men are a mixture of temperaments, although usually one predominates above the rest. There are varying degrees of temperament.

For example, some may be 60 percent sanguine and 40 percent melancholy. Some are a blend of more than two, possibly all four, such as 50 percent sanguine, 30 percent choleric, 15 percent melancholy and 5 percent phlegmatic. It is impossible to determine ratios and blends, but that is not important. What is important for our purposes is to determine your basic temperament type. Then we can study your potential strengths and weaknesses, and offer a program for overcoming your weaknesses through the power of God in you.

There is a danger in presenting these four types of temperaments; some will be tempted to analyze their friends and think of them in the framework of, "What type is he?" This is a demoralizing and precarious practice. Our study of temperaments should be for *self-analysis only*, except to make us more understanding of the natural weaknesses or shortcomings of others.

Sparky Sanguine is the warm, buoyant, lively and "enjoying" temperament. He is receptive by nature, and external impressions easily find their way to his heart, where they readily cause an outburst of response. Feelings predominate to form his decisions rather than reflective thoughts.

Mr. Sanguine has an unusual capacity to enjoy himself and usually passes on his hearty nature. When he comes into a room of people, he has a tendency to lift the spirits of everyone present by his exuberant flow of conversation. He is a thrilling story teller because his warm, emotional nature almost makes him relive the experience in the very telling of it.

Mr. Sanguine never lacks for friends. Dr. Hallesby said, "His naive, spontaneous, genial nature opens doors and hearts to him." He can genuinely feel the joys and sorrows of the person he meets and has the capacity to make him feel important, as though he were a very special friend, and he is—as is the next person he meets who then receives the same attention.

He enjoys people, does not like solitude, but is at his best surrounded by friends where he is the life of the party. He has an endless repertoire of interesting stories which he tells dramatically, making him a favorite with children as well as adults, and usually gaining him admission at the best parties or social gatherings.

Mr. Sanguine is never at a loss for words. He often speaks before thinking, but his open sincerity has a disarming effect on many of his listeners, causing them to respond to his mood. His free-wheeling, seemingly exciting, extrovertish way of life often makes him the envy of the more timid temperament types.

His noisy, blustering, friendly ways make him appear more confident than he really is, but his energy and lovable disposition gets him by the rough spots of life. People have a way of excusing his weaknesses by saying, "That's just the way Sparky is."

The world is enriched by these cheerful, sanguine people. They make good salesmen, hospital workers, teachers, conversationalists, actors, public speakers, and occasionally they are good leaders.

Rocky Choleric is the hot, quick, active, practical, and strong-willed temperament. He is often self-sufficient, and very independent. He tends to be decisive and opinionated, finding it easy to make decisions for himself as well as for other people.

Mr. Choleric thrives on activity. In fact, to him, "life is activity." He does not need to be stimulated by his environment, but rather stimulates his environment with his endless ideas, plans and ambitions. His is not an aimless activity, for he has a practical, keen mind, capable of making sound, instant decisions or planning worthwhile, long-range projects. He does not vacillate under pressure of what others think. He takes a definite stand on issues and can often be found crusading against social injustice or unhealthy situations.

He is not frightened by adversities; in fact, they tend to encourage him. He has dogged determination and often succeeds where others fail, not because his plans are better than theirs, but because he is still "pushing ahead" after others have become discouraged and quit. If there is any truth in the adage, "Leaders are born, not made," then he is a born leader. Mr. Choleric's emotional nature is the least developed part of his temperament. He does not sympathize easily with others, nor does he naturally show or express compassion. He is often embarrassed or disgusted by the tears of others. He has little appreciation for the fine arts; his primary interest is in the utilitarian values of life.

He is quick to recognize opportunities and equally as quick at diagnosing the best way to make use of them. He has a well organized mind, though details usually bore him. He is not given to analysis, but rather to quick, almost intuitive appraisal; therefore, he tends to look at the goal for which he is working without seeing the potential pitfalls and obstacles in the path. Once he has started toward his goal he may run roughshod over individuals that stand in his way. He tends to be domineering and bossy and does not hesitate to use people to accomplish his ends. He is often considered an opportunist.

Mr. Choleric's attitude of self-sufficiency and strong will makes him difficult to reach for Christ in adulthood. Even after he becomes a Christian, this spirit makes it difficult for him to actively trust Christ for daily living. Choleric Christians prob-

ably find it hardest to realize what Christ meant when he said, "Without me, you can do nothing." There is no limit to what he can do when he learns to "walk in the Spirit" and to "abide in Christ."

Many of the world's great generals and leaders have been Cholerics. He makes a good executive, idea man, producer, dictator, or criminal, depending upon his moral standards.

Like Mr. Sanguine, Mr. Choleric is usually an extrovert, although somewhat less in intensity.

Maestro Melancholy is often referred to as the "black, or dark temperament." Actually he is the richest of all the temperaments, for he is an analytical, self-sacrificing, gifted, perfectionist type, with a very sensitive emotional nature. No one gets more enjoyment from the fine arts than the melancholy.

By nature he is prone to be an introvert, but since his feelings predominate he is given over to a variety of moods. Sometimes his moods will lift him to heights of ecstasy that cause him to act more extroverted. However, at other times he will be gloomy and depressed, and during these periods he is definitely withdrawn and can be quite antagonistic.

Mr. Melancholy is a very faithful friend, but unlike the Sanguine, he does not make friends easily. He will not push himself forward to meet people, but rather lets people come to him. He is perhaps the most dependable of all the temperaments, for his perfectionist tendencies do not permit him to be a shirker or let others down when they are depending on him. His natural reticence to put himself forward is not an indication that he doesn't like people. Like the rest of us, he not only likes others but has a strong desire to be loved by them. Disappointing experiences make him reluctant to take people at their face value, thus he is prone to be suspicious when others seek him out or shower him with attention.

His exceptional analytical ability causes him to diagnose accurately the obstacles and dangers of any project he has a part in planning. This is in sharp contrast to the Choleric, who rarely anticipates problems or difficulties, but is confident he is able to cope with whatever problems arise. This characteristic often finds the Melancholy reticent to initiate some new project or in conflict with those who wish to. Occasionally when he is in one of his great moods of emotional ecstasy or inspiration he may produce some great work of art or genius. These accomplishments are often followed by periods of great depression.

Mr. Melancholy usually finds his greatest meaning in life through personal sacrifice. He seems to have a desire to make himself suffer and will often choose a difficult life vocation involving great personal sacrifice. Once chosen, he is prone to be very thorough and persistent in his pursuit of it and is more than likely to accomplish great good.

No temperament has so much natural potential when energized by the Holy Spirit as the Melancholy. Many of the world's great geniuses—artists, musicians, inventors, philosophers, educators, and theoreticians, were of the melancholy temperament. It is interesting to note that many outstanding Biblical characters were either predominantly melancholy in temperament or had strong melancholy tendencies, such as Moses, Elijah, Solomon, the Apostle John and many others.

Flip Phlegmatic gets his name from what Hippocrates thought was the body fluid that produced that "calm, cool, slow, easy-going, well-balanced temperament." Life for him is a happy, unexcited, pleasant experience in which he avoids as much involvement as possible.

Mr. Phlegmatic is so calm and easy-going that he never seems to get ruffled, no matter what the circumstances. He has a very high boiling point and seldom explodes in anger or laughter, but keeps his emotions in control. He is the one temperament type that is consistent every time you see him. Beneath the cool, reticent, almost timid personality of Mr. Phlegmatic is a very capable combination of abilities. He feels much more emotion than appears on the surface and has a good capacity to appreciate the fine arts and the better things of life.

Mr. Phlegmatic does not lack for friends because he enjoys people and has a natural dry sense of humor. He is the type of individual that can have a crowd of people "in stitches" and never crack a smile. He has the unique capability of seeing something humorous in others and the things they do. He has a good, retentive mind and is often quite capable of being a good imitator. One of his great sources of delight is "needling" or poking fun at the other temperament types. He is annoyed by the aimless, restless enthusiasm of the Sanguine and often confronts him with his futility. He is disgusted by the gloomy moods of the Melancholy and is prone to ridicule him. He takes great delight in throwing ice water on the bubbling plans and ambitions of the Choleric.

He tends to be a spectator in life and tries not to get too involved with the activities of others. In fact, it is usually with great reluctance that he is ever motivated to any form of activity beyond his daily routine. This does not mean that he cannot appreciate the need for action and the difficulties of others. He and Mr. Choleric may see the same social injustice but their response will be entirely different. The crusading spirit of the Choleric will cause him to say, "Let's get a committee organized and campaign to do something about this!" Mr. Phlegmatic would be more likely to respond by saying, "These conditions are terrible! Why doesn't someone do something about this?" Mr. Phlegmatic is usually kindhearted and sympathetic but seldom conveys his true feelings. When once aroused to action, however, he proves to be a most capable and efficient person. He will not take leadership on his own, but when it is put on him he proves a capable leader. He has a conciliating effect on others and is a natural peace-maker.

The world has greatly benefited by the gracious nature of the efficient Phlegmatic. He makes a good diplomat, accountant, teacher, leader, scientist, or other meticulous-type worker.