

“Shaped to Make a Difference: The Purpose of Your Personality”

We're in the middle of a series called "Shaped to Make a Difference." Our theme verse is Job 10:8 **"God's hand formed and shaped me" (Job 10:8, GN)**. God made you one of kind. You're unique. God made you, *you* for a purpose. God made you, *you* to make a difference. We're talking about five different aspects of your unique shape - S-H-A-P-E. God has given you **Spiritual gifts**. God has given you a basic **Heart** -- what do I love to do, motivations. God has given you natural **Abilities**. God has given you a **Personality**. God has given you **Experiences**. These five things all combine to shape you and make you unique. And God has brought you together in a unique way to live out a plan and purpose. You're not just unique, you're that way for a reason.

Today we want to look at the fourth of these qualities that make you, *you* -- your personality. We want to look at how God has given you a unique personality to make a difference.

But what is a personality? Personality refers to the way you think, the way you feel, the way you act. Part of your personality comes from hereditary factors, part of your personality comes from the environment, part of it is your choice. And your personality is a complex combination of many, many different traits. Some scientists say that there up to 18,000 different personality traits. We're very, very complex. So complex that sometimes we're a mystery to ourselves! We can't figure ourselves out. We can't figure out why we act the way we do.

But the fact is that your personality influences every area of your life. It influences every decision you make, how you deal with change or don't deal with it, how you solve problems, what makes you happy or sad, what you think is funny and what you don't think is funny at all. Your personality says a lot about the kind of work you should be in, the kind of person you should marry, the kind of ministry God wants you to have serving him. Your personality influences how you relate to God. Some people relate to God in a quiet, meditative, contemplative kind of way. Some people relate to God in a very emotional, loud kind of way. It depends upon your personality!

1 Corinthians 12 (Phillips) **"God works through different people in different ways" (1 Corinthians 12:6, Phillips)**. Every one of us thinks differently, feels differently, reacts differently, responds to life differently. And this is a good thing, except that it can also cause people to misunderstand you and it can cause you to misunderstand others. We have personality clashes and conflicts. In fact, sometimes we might think that it's better to just isolate from other people as much as possible rather than deal with personality conflicts. That's why some people don't want to get involved in church, or get plugged in to a life group.

We have to be clear that there is no right or wrong personality temperament. There is no right or wrong personality in God's book. God has given you the personality you have and he did it for a purpose. He did it intentionally.

And there are lots of different ways you could classify personality. Scientists and psychologists have been trying to do it for years. There's the MMPI -- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. There's the Myers-Briggs Survey. There's the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis. There are the classic temperaments, Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholy, and Phlegmatic. Those temperaments were written about 2,000 years ago and are still somewhat useful today.

There are many different ways and all of these ways are helpful but they're all limited because you're unique.

I took several personality tests recently. According to Gary Smalley's animal tests I'm a golden retriever. I like to be liked, I'm dedicated, sensitive and like to be appreciated. In the color test I'm a gold-red. A structured leader type who also like sot party. In the Meyers-Briggs type indicator. I'm an INFJ. I have deep convictions, I tend to champion the oppressed, I'm not easily led astray and have a knack for communication. There were lots of other tests I came across like which South Park Character are you? Which dysfunctional Barbie are you? The What Color is Your Soul Painted test.

There are many different ways to categorize personality but your personality is far too complex to fit into any simple category. But what we do need to know is that because we're all so different we have great

possibility of conflict with other people. I can't assume you think the way I do. I can't assume you feel the way I do. We're all different. As a result there's conflict. Most of your problems in life are people-problems. In fact, the Bible is full of examples of personality conflict: Paul and Barnabus, Paul and John Mark, Paul and Peter. Paul had a driven personality and it seems like people either loved him or hated him—nothing in between. There are many different problems that come as a result of personality.

I want us to dig into what we can do to understand the importance of the personality God gave you and others, and at the same time increase your personal skills with people. This is vital if we're going to be the people we have the potential to be. It's vital if we're going to live out our shape and purpose.

Because personality is so important, let's look at how we can get along better with others. **First, be aware of personality differences.** Proverbs 19:11 **"A man's wisdom gives him patience" (Proverbs 19:11, NIV.)** The more you understand how people act and react the more patient you are with them. God wants you to not only understand your personality but he wants you to understand the personalities of the people around you.

If you're not aware of why the people act the way they do you'll misjudge them, you'll misunderstand them, you'll become impatient with them and you'll be living in constant conflict with the people around you because they are different. For those who are married, you probably married your opposite. I think that's proof of God's sense of humor. Chances are if one of you are extroverted, the other is introverted. If one of you likes variety, the other likes routine. If one of you are structured the other is unstructured. If one of you reveals their emotion, the other tends to conceal their emotion. He just made us that way. I think a lot of the problems that people have in marriage can be summed up in the phrase, "Why aren't you more normal like me?" It's simply not understanding that God made people differently! It's part of the way he made you.

Awareness is not only key in your marriage and relating to people. It's a key foundation on being a good parent, being aware of the basic personality bent of your children. The Old Testament tells us the story of Jacob and Esau, two of our spiritual ancestors. It says, **"Esau loved the outdoors, but Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home" (Genesis 25:27, GN).** These two were twins. Although they were twins they were as opposite as day and night and they really didn't get along. If you had been their dad, Isaac, how would it be if you tried to force Esau to stay at home more and force Jacob to go out for wrestling, which later would have come in handy? The point is, be careful not to destroy your child by trying to mold him or her into some preconceived pattern. Find their bent. The Bible says, **"Train up a child in the way he should go..." (Proverbs 22:6, NIV).** What that means in Hebrew is the way he naturally goes, his temperament, her personality, and your children often are not going to have the same temperament as you. You need to help them value it, understand their temperament and build on the strengths of it.

But awareness is not enough. The second key to getting along with other people is to **accept and appreciate personality differences.**

The Bible says a lot about this. Romans 15:7 **"Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you" (Romans 15:7, NIV).** When you look at the twelve disciples that Jesus chose, they were as opposite as night and day. John was a very meditative, thoughtful type of person. Peter was Mr. Impulsive, Mr. Energy, Mr. Foot-in-Mouth. They had differences. Nathaniel had an easy time believing. Thomas had a difficult time believing. Simon was a Zealot -- a kind of PLO of the day. Matthew was a Roman tax collector. They wouldn't have gotten along in **any** social setting. God uses ordinary people and there isn't any one type of personality that God uses. He uses every type of personality. We need to accept our differences.

"Accept others just as Christ accepted you." I have discovered that people who look up to God, rarely look down on people. If you look up to God, you don't look down on people because you realize that he made them all. What does it mean to accept one another? What does it mean to accept your husband/wife/boyfriend/boss/whatever? It means to realize that differences are not a matter of right or wrong. They're not a matter of good or bad. They're just different. So we accept each other because God loves variety. Just look around. God loves differences.

It's like a church. No church appeals to everybody. That's OK. It's not a matter of right or wrong, good or bad, it's a matter of what is your personality. You need to find a church where you can say, "That's where I fit!"

Don't criticize differences, celebrate them. Ephesians 4:2 says, "**Generously make allowances for each other because you love each other**" (Ephesians 4:2, Ph). That verse can save your marriage. Stop trying to change your mate to be like you. God didn't **want** them to be like you! He made them different. He gave them that personality. You need to learn to not only be aware of differences but accept those differences. Accept the personality that God gave the people around you.

If you learn to not only be aware and accept but also appreciate the differences of the people around you it will not only make your life a whole lot easier but you'll become like Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is aware of all the personalities; he made them. And he accepts them. He appreciates them. To be Christ-like means to see the value in each of the differences He's given to people.

Romans 12:10 "**Have a profound respect for each other.**" (Romans 12:10, JB). That's what God commands you to do. Appreciate. How do I have profound respect for somebody with negative characteristics? Negative qualities? You need to look behind it and see that many times a negative character trait, a negative personality problem, is often a positive characteristic being misused. For instance, the person who is hyper-critical may have the positive characteristic of discernment, they're just misusing it. Somebody who is bossy all the time, is misusing the positive characteristic of responsibility. Somebody who is impulsive all the time is misusing the positive characteristic of flexibility. Look behind the negative and see what is being misused. It just needs to be channeled. Many of your children, rather than trying to change their negative points, help them to realize that properly disciplined and brought under control and directed, those points can be the source of their very success. Because that's the way God made them.

It seems in our world, the number of dysfunctional people is increasing. Why? I think it's because nobody has ever understood or accepted or appreciated what God made them to be. If you felt like "I don't think anybody understands me. I don't think anybody accepts me. I don't think anybody appreciates me." Jesus Christ does. He made you, he knows you, he cares about you, he accepts you, he values you, he died for you. If you'll give your life to him, he will help you develop the personality he gave you to its greatest potential. If you haven't done that, do so. For those of you who are believers, God expects you, as he expects me, to obey Romans 12:10 "*Have a profound respect for each other.*" By being aware and accepting and appreciating others you can then share God's greatest gift of Jesus Christ with people.

These three words are words we value here at Saint Paul's. We want Saint Paul's to have an atmosphere that is aware of people's differences, that accepts people's differences, and that appreciates them and values the diversity. You can have unity in a church without uniformity. You can have differences without division. Knowing your personality and how you can and should interact with others is vital in knowing your SHAPE and living out your purpose and making a difference in this world. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church, for his resources for this message and the SHAPE small group curriculum.