

Learning, Accepting, and Honoring Our Children's Temperaments

Moms, Tots, and Beyond: April 5, 2018

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."
--Psalm 139: 13-14 (NIV)

TEMPERAMENT: how a child approaches and reacts to the world; tends to be innate but can be affected by environment, health, and social context

Key Biblical Truths

1) *All people reflect something of God's character and likeness (even when marred by sin).*

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'"
--Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

2) *God seems to delight in diversity—and uses variety to express the breadth of His glory and creativity.*

"How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."
--Psalm 104:24 (NIV)

"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made"
--Romans 1:20 (ESV)

3) *All children need to be rescued from sin and the ways that it distorts every part of us.*

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
--Romans 3:23 (NIV)

4) *God works with us uniquely, according to the particulars of our individuality.*

"Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. . . . He asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'"
--John 21:20-22

5) *Our differences serve His body and His purposes.*

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

--Romans 12:6-8 (NIV)

(See also I Corinthians 12:8-10)

6) *The Bible provides examples of people of varying temperaments who are used powerfully by God at particular times. Jesus perfectly reflects characteristics of both temperaments.*

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build . . . a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

--Excerpts from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NIV)

“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

--John 10:14-18 (NIV)

Compliant: agreeable, obedient, cooperative, tractable, accommodating, trainable, manageable, orderly, dutiful, disciplined, gentle, meek, mild, easygoing

- Inclined to agree with others or follow rules, sometimes to an excessive degree
- Parents may find these children to be “a joy,” and receive praise and accolades from others, may feel successful at parenting. Parents may find these children so “easy” that they get missed or overlooked, or end up relying on the child as a confidante or “mini-adult.”
- Biblical examples of its goodness: Abraham sacrificing Isaac; Noah obeying instructions precisely for the Ark; Psalm 119—a meditation on the beauty of God’s law; blessed are the meek, peacemakers; be all things to all people; Mary—“Let it be to me as you have said”
- Biblical examples of pitfalls: Joseph hated by his brothers, gives a bad report of them to father; self-righteousness of Pharisees and the older son in prodigal story
- Distortion: obeying out of fear, people-pleasing, self-righteousness, or simple dedication to “the rules”—making the system work for them

Strong-willed: determined, resolute, willful, hardheaded, headstrong, stubborn, obstinate, unyielding, disorderly, oppositional, dissident, non-conformist, contrary, insubordinate, intense, spirited, passionate, bold, courageous

- Inclined to challenge the status quo; to test boundaries, especially as a means of learning or gathering information; to live at “full throttle”
- Parents may feel exhausted, with a sense of having to be “on” at all time; may experience a sense of failure, sometimes stemming from others’ judgment; and may find themselves in frequent power struggles with the child
- Biblical examples of its goodness: Joshua and Caleb; “Be strong and courageous”; “Stand firm” when putting on the armor of God; Jesus as the Lion of Judah; Proverbs

31 (speak up for the weak; defend the widow and needy); Peter's courage and intense pursuit of relationship with Jesus; Paul's boldness

- Biblical examples of its pitfalls: stubbornness (Pharaoh)—hardened heart; Proverbs—the fool says I want my own way; Jonah's disobedience; rash, foolish, impulsive behavior (Peter)
- Distortion: I only want to obey if the command makes sense to me, if I can buy into it. Desire for mastery, control, authority, and respect.

Discussion

What else do you think is generally true of children with these temperaments or leanings? How do you see these distinctions/categories blending into one another?

What other examples of these temperaments or traits can you observe in the Bible?

What is your own temperament, and how does it interplay with your child's/children's temperaments? What qualities can you more readily appreciate in your kids? How are you struggling to understand or honor your children in their unique temperaments?

“Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker,
those who are nothing but potsherds
among the potsherds on the ground.
Does the clay say to the potter,
‘What are you making?’
Does your work say,
‘The potter has no hands?’
¹⁰ Woe to the one who says to a father,
‘What have you begotten?’
or to a mother,
‘What have you brought to birth?’
¹¹ “This is what the LORD says—
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:
Concerning things to come,
do you question me about my children,
or give me orders about the work of my hands?
¹² It is I who made the earth
and created mankind on it.
My own hands stretched out the heavens;
I marshaled their starry hosts.”
--Isaiah 45: 9-12

What are you needing from God as you nurture your specific, individual children amidst the gifts and challenges in their temperaments? How might you be quarreling with the Maker of your children, and how might God be calling you to repent or to be more hopeful for their futures?